

## **A story that would (O)therwise not have been told**

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### **Summary**

My mini-dissertation gives the autobiography of Talent Nyathi, who was born in rural Zimbabwe in 1961. Talent was unwillingly conscripted into the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle. On her return to Zimbabwe, she has worked tirelessly for the education of her compatriots.

Talent's story casts light on subject-formation in conditions of difficulty, suffering and victimization. Doubly oppressed by her race and gender, Talent has nevertheless shown a remarkable capacity for self-empowerment and the empowerment of others.

Her story needs to be heard because it will inspire other women and other S/subjects and because it is a corrective to both the notions of a heroic Struggle and the 'victim' stereotype of Africa.

Together with Talent's autobiography, my mini-dissertation offers extensive notes that situate her life story in the context of contemporary postcolonial, literary and gender theory and further draws out the significance of her individual 'history-from-below'.

### **Ten key terms**

subject-formation    blackness    girl-child    postcolonial    Rhodesia-Zimbabwe

teenage-conscript    history-from-below    victimization

self-empowerment    literacy

**A STORY THAT WOULD (O)THERWISE NOT HAVE BEEN TOLD**

by

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I declare that .....

is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE

(Mrs P I Alexander)

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DATE

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## Introduction

In this mini-dissertation, I tell the story of Talent Nyathi. My aim is to provide a corrective to the 'victim' stereotype that is so often shown in the media. She is a self-empowered and empowering African woman who has done a great deal to improve conditions for her fellow Zimbabweans and who has also shown immense courage under suffering.

I was confident that 'writing' Talent's story would have value as 'history-from-below,' or what Spivak calls 'information retrieval in silenced areas,'<sup>1</sup> but it has been interesting to have illustrations of what a gendered and postcolonial identity means in the Zimbabwean and African contexts. I also expected to interrogate some of my stereotypical thinking. What was unexpected, however, was the embodied aspect of 'Otherness' that the female comrades' cruelty represented, as well as the birth of an activist in response to the elitism of the black (mostly male) leadership.

In Talent Nyathi's life 'the personal is not only political, as feminists have said, but sociological and historical as well.'<sup>2</sup> This is no ordinary story, but the auto/biography of a daughter of Africa dedicated to breaking the silence of a generation groomed to be slaves. Her story deserves to be heard by other women and by other colonized subjects as an inspiration to them about what can be done under conditions of victimization and difficulty.

It was precisely because Talent's story and stories like hers suffer from the double silencing of female and black people that I wanted to 'write' her/story. However I was

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<sup>1</sup> 'Can the subaltern speak?' in Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, A Reader, ed. Williams and Chrisman, p. 90

<sup>2</sup> In her essay 'Resident Alien, Feminine Cultural Criticism,' Janet Woolf quotes Wini Brenes, UNISA Gender, Identity and Embodiment Reader, July 2001, p. 242.

very mindful of Spivak's admonition<sup>3</sup> of the need 'to work for the subaltern rather than to speak for her.' I believe this particular 'conversational narrative' was made possible because it was based on friendship and on a 'real space ... a non-coerced space.'<sup>4</sup> I feel privileged, not only that Talent gave me time on Christmas Eve and Boxing Day of 2001, but that two years prior to those conversations she had invited me to be part of her community, that is, the Africa Book Development Trust.

Whilst I was very aware that I would be making use of the material for my own academic purposes, I do believe that my starting point was the 'curiosity' that Trinh Minh-ha refers to and that what I wanted in wanting to know Talent was not to be a 'sterile spectator' but to better understand and so begin to 'live [more] fearlessly with and within difference.'<sup>5</sup>

Talent not only did not hesitate in committing to the project but in fact was delighted as she said she would want me to edit her autobiography one day. The difference between the story she may write one day and this account is that the gender focus uncovered areas that Talent had not looked at – her obvious emotion over the brutality of the doctor who 'threw' injections at them and of the women in charge of the refugee camps certainly brought to mind what Soshana Felman and Dori Lamb said of the holocaust survivors – 'for the first time to believe that it is possible ... to be heard ... to address ... the suffering, the truth... to a hearing "you" and to a listening community.'<sup>6</sup>

In outline, here is her story.

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<sup>3</sup> Paper delivered at the New Nation Conference, JHB, Dec. 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Lugones, M and Spelman, E. "Have we got a theory for you!" WSIF, 1983, p. 576.

<sup>5</sup> Women Native Other, pp. 80, 15 & 84 respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Coullie on 'South African Women's Autobiographies' in ARIEL, Jan 1996, p. 136.

Talent was born in 1961 in a rural village in southern Rhodesia.<sup>7</sup> Her maternal grandfather was a spirit medium and less traditional than most men – he did not believe that girls should fetch water, cut firewood or plough the fields – and her uncle, a lay preacher, endorsed her Youth Group activities. Her grandmother allowed her to start school at the age of five and Talent loved school from the very beginning. She and her girl cousin worked hard in the fields to be able to take up two of the coveted Form I places.<sup>8</sup>

History intervened in that their mission school, Manama, was the first group of children to be ‘abducted’ in the Liberation Struggle and, aged 14, Talent had to cope with the march across harsh, dry country to Botswana. Freedom in the form of wine, men and cigarettes did not seduce her; nor did talk of education abroad. The flight to Lusaka held the thrill everyone feels on their first plane ride but the refugee camps were a de-humanising experience. Talent was punished for starting evening classes for the girls who had never been to school; she was punished for washing when water was scarce and was made to walk into a sewer. She was lucky not to lose her eyesight.

The Manama group was transferred to a military camp and this was a vast improvement; the days were structured and skills were learned. Talent was made a platoon leader and earned the reputation of the best orienteer. She was then sent to East Germany for three years; here, for the first time, she understood the nature of the Struggle and saw women in positions of responsibility. She soaked up all the knowledge and experience on offer, ready to return home and to put the lessons she had learnt into practice, but as Talent was not only a member of the losing party but also of the minority

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<sup>7</sup> UDI was declared in 1964; the guerilla war started in 1972; independence was achieved in April 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Standard 6: there was scarcity of places for black pupils under Smith’s Government.

tribe<sup>9</sup> this was easier said than done. Keeping a low profile, she set up a training programme in the co-operative movement and then moved on to the Zimbabwe Foundation of Education with Production and finally the Ministry of Education.

A group of like-minded people worked together, but their style of ‘leav[ing] the people’s voices within the books ... was not very amusing to the rulers of the time’ (51)<sup>10</sup> and in 1991 they were forbidden to publish *Elections and Leadership, Choosing the Future*. And so, with Z\$2 000<sup>11</sup> and a great conviction, Africa Community Publishing for Development (ACPD) was established. ACPD trained people at the margins of society to be pre-school teachers, to take part in workshops on good leadership, to manage a core library and to form study circles to produce (and put into action) handbooks on income-generating projects. (Appendix I)

They did all this with money they raised themselves by approaching NGOs and they retained those same NGOs’ support through a policy of accountability. A case in point is when the ACPD accountant defrauded the organisation of Z\$220 000.<sup>12</sup> The team accepted that their management of the processes was partly to blame and so they did outside consulting work and paid back every cent that was outstanding after his assets had been sold. New systems were then implemented.

The longer I worked with these people and got to know them and where they had come from, the more apparent it became that their stories needed to be told and needed to be heard by the many detractors of Africa and the ‘third world.’ As it was, I only got to

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<sup>9</sup> The two main Liberation parties were ZANU (led by Robert Mugabe and drawn mainly from the Shona tribe, who were numerically the largest) and ZIPRA/ZAPU (led by Joshua Nkomo and drawn mainly from the Matabele tribe).

<sup>10</sup> Page references to the text *A story that would (O)therwise not have been told*.

<sup>11</sup> R1000.

<sup>12</sup> R40 000, in September 2000. The budget for 2003 is equal to R500 000.



‘hear’ the life story of one of them, but one day I hope to be involved in writing up the histories of the people who make up this remarkable organisation.

Talent and I had two three-hour sessions together. My focus was to record Talent’s experiences and narrative from a gender point of view and also for what they reveal of conditions in post-colonial (African) society. This story could equally have been told from a sociologist’s point of view, with facts and figures to support Talent’s and the team’s contribution to nation- building. This contribution would document results as diverse as enhanced exam results at schools where the core libraries are situated, the income generated by chicken-raising and soap-making projects, the self-esteem that comes when people realise that their ideas are of value ( ‘earning by your wits’ <sup>13</sup> ) and the writing down and preservation of Tonga oral literature.

The significance of Talent’s story for me, aside from a deepened understanding of our country’s recent history, and aside from how the theory of my MA studies was translated into reality, is highlighted in relation to the novel *Nervous Conditions*. <sup>14</sup> The specific space of the two texts, both geographically and historically, is the same. The many parallels of Talent’s story with that of Tambu serve to underline certain postcolonial themes and issues, whilst the differences serve to remind us that individual circumstances and personalities result in the condition of the native being **more** or **less** of a nervous condition.

Dangarembga specifically ended her story in 1972, the year that the Liberation War began. Her character, Tambu, is in Form I and is just beginning to be aware that the ‘process of expansion [is] a long and painful process’ and that that she can no longer

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<sup>13</sup> Virginia Woolf was the first to highlight the importance of the independence for women (Others) that 500 pounds earned from writing brings; Eagleton, M. (ed) *Feminist Literary Theory*, p.10.

accept 'Sacred Heart and what it represented as a sunrise on [her] horizon' <sup>15</sup> because that education brings with it some Imperialist baggage. A year later in a dormitory some 400 km south, Talent was introduced to Liberation tapes and literature and was deciding whether these represented a sunrise on her horizon. The events of January 1975 overtook her postcolonial musings but those events could just as easily have taken place at Tambu's school in the Eastern Highlands, except that their destination would have been the ZANU camps in Mozambique.

For my title I have used the phrase 'A story that would (O)therwise not have been told' because, in a sense I instigated the 'telling' of the story and because of the play on first part of the word 'otherwise.' The (O)therness derives from Talent's gendered and postcolonial S/subjectivity; what I did not anticipate was her inscribed subjectivity that breaks the silence of 'worse things [that] happened to the women ... in the so-called heroic Struggle' (23). It was those 'worse things' that made 'for gripping reading that frequently seems stranger than fiction.' <sup>16</sup> Talent came up from the bottom of the power-hierarchy in colonized Rhodesia; she also came up from the bottom of the power-hierarchy in the new Zimbabwe; she continued to overcome obstacles, and to help others to overcome obstacles. In order to interrogate the obstacles, I introduce her story with five chapters that examine five aspects - (O)therness, the auto/biographical mode, identity construction, the more general question of Human Rights and finally some thoughts concerning the 'author.'

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<sup>14</sup> Dangarembga, Tsitsi, 1988.

<sup>15</sup> Nervous Conditions, Harare, ZPH, 1988, p. 203/4.

## Chapter 1

### (O)therwise – gender, race, class and postcoloniality

Early on in her story, Talent recalls a missionary woman using the word *African* ‘to mean “black people” in a hurtful way’ (7). Her articulation of the construction of race is very powerful in its honesty:

What used to happen, even if you were at a missionary centre, white children were white children ... even in the name of God, they remained whites ... what does ‘remain[ing] white’ mean? Does it mean they remain aloof? The system was such that you have to feel your blackness. (7)

This ‘system’ is, of course, not limited to Africa. Noel Ignatiev, in his groundbreaking work *How the Irish became White* (1995), argues that the defining quality of whiteness is privilege. Howard Zinn says it this way: ‘This brings us back to Spivak via Marx – the power of the economic reality in creating a false consciousness based not on essentialist principles but on constructed factors.’<sup>17</sup> ‘To be “Negro” is to be the biological’<sup>18</sup> and Negrophobia is about inscribing the black African as primitive and sub-human. Talent graciously acknowledges that by 2001 ‘[t]he world has changed ... [and] you don’t find people thinking “African” in the sense of inferior.’ She does add the rider that ‘it is still a question of individuals [and] [t]hose (non-racist) individuals are very few’ (56).

Talent is very open about whiteness: ‘[i]n those times, you came to believe that white skin is super skin. A lot of people ... envied to be white<sup>19</sup> and so they applied *Ambi* skin-toning lotion’ (6). She did not bother and poked fun at those who had whitish

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<sup>16</sup> Byrne, Deirdre, ‘A different kind of resistance.’ *UNISA English Studies*, 1994, no 2, p.23.

<sup>17</sup> *A People’s History of the USA*, p.35.

<sup>18</sup> Fuss, Diana. *Essentially Speaking*, p.47.

faces and black hands but in fact, as Fanon points out in his chapter on ‘The Fact of Blackness’, scientists in the 1950s did believe in a serum for ‘denegrification.’<sup>20</sup> For a Senegalese woman<sup>21</sup> the realisation of blackness was more traumatic. While trying on wigs as a student newly arrived in Brussels, she could tell that the wigs did not suit her:

“You’re right ... these are wigs for white woman ... I’m very sorry but I can’t help you” ... The front of the shop window of mirrored glass reflected my face. I couldn’t believe my eyes. That face couldn’t belong to me ... my eyes were bulging, my skin was shiny and black, the face terrifying.<sup>22</sup>

Just as to be Negro is to be biological, so to be Woman is to be inscribed in terms of anatomy. The grannies of Mberengwa referred to the girls as *kamuhure*, which simply means ‘the little prostitute.’ In their opinion, ‘a woman grew up to be nothing more than a sexual object to produce children’ (1). (Hollywood still writes women’s bodies in these terms!) The old people in Talent’s village, in villages across Zimbabwe and indeed across most of the world, thought that all the education a girl needed was enough to enable her to ‘writ[e] a letter to the boyfriend so that she will not have to look for someone to read their letters’ (1).

Talent’s matter-of-fact comment about prostitutes is interesting; they were ‘some of the so-called independent and rich women’ (1). This could be a description of Defoe’s Roxanna<sup>23</sup> entering the heady days of mercantile capitalism in Europe two centuries earlier. Talent goes on: ‘[t]hey owned property in their own right ... they had status ... they were the most beautiful ladies in the area. Their children never walked barefoot: they were always in tennis shoes’ (1). This choice of detail, barefoot versus shoes, serves

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<sup>19</sup> Frantz Fanon writes: ‘For, in a word, the race must be whitened: every woman in Martinique knows this, says it...’ ( *Black Skin, White Masks*, p.47).

<sup>20</sup> Fanon, p.111.

<sup>21</sup> Bugul, Ken. *The Abandoned Baobab*.

<sup>22</sup> Bugul, p. 37.

to underline conditions in the ‘third world’ where a pair of shoes is not just of practical value but also a mark of status.

So widespread is the patriarchal gaze that I think female readers all over the world will identify with Talent’s sentiments of ‘when I grow up, I will show these [boys]’ (2). And show them she did! Her boy cousin tried to lure her away from school but he does not succeed - ‘I really loved school’ (3). At Manama Mission, the boys tried to subvert the girls’ work ethic by getting them to ‘concentrat[e] on this godly-founded figure’ (5). (Talent’s perceptiveness about the male ego shows in her choice of phrase!) By letting her cousins read the letters, those same boys were ‘in more trouble than they thought they would put me into!’ (5). Later, at military camp, Talent says ‘I enjoyed [orientation exercises], especially if I beat the male-led units’ (37).

In spite of her gender and the postcolonial environment, this child of Africa sailed through childhood, top of her class, working alongside the family for school fees and impressing someone enough to have her fees subsidised. Her first challenge came from class conflict in her teenage years, but she emerged with an even stronger identity:

It made you feel poor. In those boarding schools, you could feel your class position because you didn’t have much. My auntie used to just roast peanuts and salt them and we would gather them and that would take us through the term because it was just a handful of peanuts every day for me and my cousin. That was okay - we didn’t see anything wrong with it but now when I look at the whole system, it was very manipulated. Some of these rich kids could not even wash their clothes - they could not even iron. They depended heavily on other children. I remember this one girl saying to me, ‘Can you wash my tennis shoes? I will give you a slice of bread in turn.’ So I took her tennis shoes, I went outside and I packed them with a lot of mud, I really made them dirty. I found cow dung and I smeared them all over and then I took these tennis shoes to her. She didn’t ask me again. (*Laughing*) When I brought the tennis shoes to her she said, ‘Why didn’t you wash them?’ I said, ‘Well, I ... don’t like your bread, and the way that your shoes look now is how I feel about you asking me to wash your shoes.’ Nobody ever asked me to do anything again. (9)

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<sup>23</sup> Defoe, Daniel. Roxanna.

Although this is a most amusing episode, the fact was that in that boarding school ‘you could feel your class position ... Imagine not even having the courtesy of saying “would you like [to try some tinned peaches?”]’ (8) as you are asked to pass ‘treats’ down the table.

Her next challenge was the call to arms to free Rhodesia and, in characteristic fashion, she tested the propaganda against her personal belief system; she was only 14 and the ‘wild’ language, the concept of leaving her family and cleaving to the army, or at least to the male soldiers, did not appeal. However, more by threat than by promise, she found herself in a refugee camp in Zambia; it was a living hell for this young girl and her ‘educated’ sisters. How can one explain female-on-female brutality when the females are on the same side? What emerges is a Mandela-type example of the real power being at the periphery and not the supposed ‘centre,’ with the prisoners and not the warders. Talent’s gaze is sure – ‘we were all women and as women we decided to educate each other’ (31).

But the cruelty continued:

When those girls decided to punish us they would do really good things, in their opinion, to make sure that we suffered – kicking us with those boots, making us crawl on grass that is perhaps one and a half metres tall on a ground that was never trodden upon. There would be bottles, there would be stones, there would be bones and you stampede on this ground with your body until it is soft. (29)

Talent was transferred to military camp and her experience of the powers of horror, of peoples’ hearts of darkness was over for the moment. The move to the military camp was a good one. Although it was very physical, Talent was happy to be learning skills such as compass reading and electronics. She was one of two who were allocated a radio and given the responsibility of summarising the news bulletins (broadcast by the BBC, VOA,

SABC, Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation) for the twice-daily briefings of the thousands of trainees.

One of the few people for whom the promise of further education was fulfilled, Talent was sent abroad and found not only a 'sober' people in the East Germans but also an understanding of and a belief in the Liberation Struggle. She also finally came to a place of being proud to be a woman, surrounded as she was by women in high places. She soaked up all the teaching and discussion, always with an eye to what ideas would work in her beloved homeland; her critical faculties were honed and she was under no illusions about Mugabe being something of a puppet for the former colonial power.

The reality of being the 'losing' party, of not being part of the majority tribal grouping, made her homecoming the second most traumatic event after the camps. Both within the co-operative movement and within her marriage there was disillusionment but Talent displayed an initiative that debunks the stereotype in the Western media of a black woman with a begging bowl and with flies around the mouths of her starving children.

Inspired by a particular individual, with white skin pigment and a different biological body (that is, a white man), Talent moved into programmes for the development of communities and, together with four colleagues, motivated a disparate group of funders and two grassroots organisations were born.<sup>24</sup> Their vision was 'to make sure that these subjects of the ruling class can also grow out of being subjects and be themselves' (51). She combined a busy public life with a full private life, the single parent of three children and an active member of her church and community.

The feminist theorist, Susan Bordo, exhorts women 'to view their bodies as a site of struggle where we must work to keep our daily practices in the service of resistance to

gender-dominance and not in the service of docility and gender normalization.’<sup>25</sup>

Talent’s victory in this regard was not typical of her peers. Many of the girl-abductees joined the boys in the new-found freedom and were soon smoking, drinking and selling their bodies. Readers might find Talent’s sarcasm pious – ‘Liberation, Adventures Unlimited’ (18) – but her choice of word, ‘dehumanised,’ attests to the situation of a 14-year-old who was both scared to death of terrorists who used foul language and could change themselves into snakes and yet secure in her own values, values she maintained throughout her life.

For all her matter-of-fact observations about prostitution, Talent was brought up, like many women, to value ‘virginity-before-marriage’. For black women (and many white ones, too!), virginity before marriage made the woman’s virginity a commodity to be exchanged; there was no such requirement for black men. Times are changing but even in 2001, when I was a part-time student at the University of Zimbabwe, a discussion based on *Surfacing* by Margaret Atwood about abortion, condoms and menstruation in a mixed (gender-wise) group was almost taboo.

It was similar to Talent’s reaction to sex classes in the refugee camp: ‘[w]hen you have no cotton wool, what you insert in your vagina is – blah, blah, blah ... I tell you I’ve never...(speechless). I could not understand how anyone could be so wild in his talk’ (25). Talent’s story is very ‘embodied’ and there are frequent references to the fortunes of her body under the harsh military regime: here is very much the ‘bodilyness’ of the French feminists.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> ACPD (discussed earlier) and the sister organization, Africa Book Development Trust (ABDT).

<sup>25</sup> UNISA Reader, p.135

<sup>26</sup> Writing on ‘écriture feminine’ Mary Jacobus says ‘the feminine located in the gaps, the absences, the unsayable or unrepresentable of discourse and representation,’ Eagleton, Mary (ed), p.300.



The fact that the uniforms made for no distinction between male and female was 'fine' by Talent. In his study of Frelimo, Harry West contends that the girls 'felt empowered rather than victimized by the war ... *A Luta Continua!* (The Struggle Continues!) Now, however, they fight in relative isolation. As women and without guns.'<sup>27</sup> Mazrui believes that '[t]he future for genuine empowerment of women in Africa requires either or both the demilitarisation of African politics or the androgynization of the African military.'<sup>28</sup> Talent advocates literacy specifically because it empowers the individual; more of that in chapter three.

Racism within Zimbabwe must include mention of tribalism, not all of which is negative because the tribe does provide a cultural commonality, but 'there was a lot of bullying' (9) at senior school level. Talent talks of tribalism in 1972 and, although membership of ZAPU was 'a marginal issue' (48) by 1988, twelve years later her son and daughter were very aware that 'Matabeles are sort of tolerated' (54). Her son and his peers saw Matabele school-leavers being forced into the Congolese war and were adamant that 'these tribalistic things must go' (54). Her daughter confronted her school authorities about the girl-on-girl abuse of the Shona versus the Ndebele that was fostered implicitly by the matron.

Talent seems surprised by her daughter's outspokenness but as Angela says 'I was raised to speak my mind' (55). How did Talent go about empowering her children? Two aspects were similar to her own empowerment – education (all three attended a good senior boarding school, Solusi Mission) and the anchor of Christian principles. Talent's work in development through education is about changing people from victims to people

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<sup>27</sup> 'Girls with Guns: narrating the experience of Frelimo's 'female detachment'', p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> Mazrui, Ali. 'The Black Woman and the Problem of Gender.' p.100.

with choices and their Christian upbringing would presumably help her children to make the informed choices she did, choosing between what is in the greater good and what is not.

Talent took her children's education further by making a point of discussing and analysing issues, for example slavery and the film *Roots*. She made no distinction between male and female domestic roles - the boys share in the housework with each person cooking 'their favourites.' This is not typical of African households as this extract from *Nervous Conditions* shows:

I couldn't bear the smell of blood that threatened to suffocate when boiling water was poured over the headless bird to loosen its feathers. Next time, I thought naively, ... [if] he wants to eat chicken, he will catch it and kill it. ...Netsai's beating [for not carrying her brother's luggage properly] should have made it clear that Nhamo was not interested in being fair, certainly not to his sisters. ...The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate.<sup>29</sup>

What about the position of black women at the dawn of the new millennium? Talent makes the point that white males still have little confidence in her analytical skills – 'your disadvantage is double-fold; that you are black and that you are a woman' (56). In her own community, men and women speak of her as a man 'because I've been able to do all these things' (56). Nevertheless the adult Talent 'feels good to be a woman' (56) and paints an amusing cameo of the villagers assuming that the white person (*murungu*) on the ADBT team is the boss and then slowly realising that 'you are actually a *murungu* of a *murungu*!' (56).

## Chapter 2

### S/subjects<sup>30</sup> break the silence through Autobiography

Talent is an example of a woman's triumph over the 'triple oppression' of 'Third World' women in terms of class, race and gender; her story also has the potential to be history-from-below in its exposure of the oppression of women by women in the guerrilla movement and of the oppression of a minority group by the ruling party in the post-postcolonial Zimbabwe. The problem, though, was how to present the material?

Deirdre Byrne referred me to several texts. The first, *Women of Phokeng*,<sup>31</sup> takes the form of oral history interviews or what Ronald Grele<sup>32</sup> calls 'conversational narratives' and, having completed the writing up of my interview with Talent, 'conversational narrative' is an accurate description of the process. I took Bozzoli's point that the structured attitude survey was not an option because the interviewees often don't speak honestly (at that stage I thought I might interview several of the ACPD team) and nor were the tools of the historians valid because, as Janet Todd comments, 'history is not gendered, only the telling.'<sup>33</sup>

I also tried to avoid the positivistic approach, which one might call 'gobbets of useful answers to key questions.'<sup>34</sup> I did, however, ask Talent to tell her story from the point of view of growing up as a girl-child, as a young woman and then as an adult female.

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<sup>29</sup> p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> A reference to this postcolonial notion as in 'the nexus of knowledge and power created the 'oriental,' constituting the colonial subject as Other' (*Orientalism*, Edward Said p.27) and the 'asymmetrical obliteration of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity ('Can the subaltern speak,' Spivak, p.76.).

<sup>31</sup> Bozzoli, Belinda with Mmantho Nkotsoe, Ravan, Johannesburg, 1991.

<sup>32</sup> Bozzoli, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Eagleton, Mary (ed), p. 62.

<sup>34</sup> Bozzoli, p. 3.

Injustice towards women is inscribed in traditional African culture as this example shows. In 1990, the play written by a group of senior school girls for the interhouse drama festival focussed on the tradition of *ngosi*; the daughter ‘pays the price’ of a family feud and is sent as ‘junior wife’ to the wronged man and has then to endure ‘the feel of dust between her toes’ while the school bell peals, but not for her.

*Women of Phokeng* describes the consciousness of the powerless being ‘at times pulled together and rationalised into powerfully and more consistent social visions.’<sup>35</sup> The ANC is cited as a case in point. In Talent’s case it was the Liberation Struggle (albeit reluctantly at first) or, in the case of the group of women I referred to, it was FRELIMO.<sup>36</sup> Bozzoli’s study sees ‘black South African women asserting their dignity, class capacity, cultural patterns... but these occur within a framework of inequality and structured brutality.’<sup>37</sup>

Talent’s story is about dignity in the face of brutality, but hers is the dignity of a young teenager in the face of female-on-female brutality in the refugee camps. She talks of the class structure within her race, of rich young girls at school who brought their own tinned food. She also talks of the gendered social framework, of it being a curse of Creation to be born woman - from Salani ‘whose parents didn’t believe in sending girls to school’ (30) to Talent’s scariest moment of ‘contemplating us being used as sexual objects ... I felt it was bad to be a woman’ (22). In adulthood, the system that Talent fights against is the elitism and tribalism of the ruling party.

I also used Bozzoli’s chronological method, taking Talent through events from early childhood to adulthood. Bozzoli cautions against interviewees romanticizing their

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<sup>35</sup> Bozzoli, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> The freedom fighters who overthrew Portuguese rule in Mozambique.

childhood, exaggerating the role they played as activists, but I realised that the very fact of Bozzoli needing an interpreter meant that her group was altogether different from Talent, that the women of Phokeng are the voiceless subalterns that Spivak<sup>38</sup> believes can never be ‘represented.’

It was Judith Coullie’s essay ‘(In)continent (I)-lands’<sup>39</sup> that really confirmed the autobiographical approach. She contends that ‘[t]hese autobiographical subjects smudge the boundaries of the ‘I-land’ because ... the argument for the importance of the women’s testimonies is reinforced by their implication that their oppression is shared [and] because ... indigenous black cultural models construct communally defined selves.’<sup>40</sup> She cites the title of Griesel’s book, *Sibambene*, which in Zulu means ‘we pull together.’

Coullie also says that ‘[a]utobiographical testimony often has been recognised as a political act in that the person testifying asserts the right to speak rather than to be spoken for.’<sup>41</sup> She points to the obvious complications (as would Spivak) ‘caused by the presence of the ...researcher ... [and] the use of English.’<sup>42</sup> Talent is very fluent in English and my promptings were minimal but nevertheless her errors in English grammar and the fact that speech rhythms are very different from academic conventions in writing meant that the text had to be edited by both me as ‘author’ and by my supervisor.

Nadine Gordimer is quoted in the preface to the second text examined by Coullie as saying ‘[Kuzwayo] is history in the person of one woman ... [She] is not Westernised: she is one of those who have Africanised the Western concept of women and in herself

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<sup>37</sup> Bozzoli, p. 2.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> In ARIEL, January 1996, pp. 133-145.

<sup>40</sup> Coullie, p. 133.

<sup>41</sup> Coullie, p. 136.

<sup>42</sup> Coullie, p. 136.

achieved a synthesis with meaning for all who experience cultural conflict.’<sup>43</sup> The connotations of ‘wild’ and ‘sober’ for Talent illustrate this synthesis. Her traditional, rural background melded with Christianity is the touchstone for her evaluation of the ‘terrorists’ as ‘wild’, of the attitudes in the refugee camps as ‘de-humanising’. By contrast, the social values and work ethic of an industrial, socialist/communist people earns the East Germans the adjective ‘sober.’

Kuzwayo’s *Call Me Woman* concludes with a list of names of black women medical doctors and lawyers; Coullie notes that this depersonalizes the narrative but also emphasizes the point that, in traditional South African cultures, the individual can never be self-made - ‘a person is a person because of other people.’ This characteristic is mirrored in Talent’s recollection of the pride that her community take in ‘their’ childrens’ successes – ‘you would become a celebrity ... if you got a place in Form I’ (5). Talent’s story is also the story of her cousin and of the other Manama Mission girls and her voice is the new voice of the activists in response to the elitism of Mugabe’s government. Coullie makes the point that ‘[t]he “voice” of the women emerges from a fuller reality, a reality which they point to and prove.’<sup>44</sup> This ‘reality’ is Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in the second half of the twentieth century.

In traditional societies, all Africans see themselves as ‘an integral part of a big and complex machine called “the family.”’ However ... [Kuzwayo’s] primary relationship is less pivotally that between the women and the men in the family ... than that of the autobiographical subject and the community of black women... the autobiographical

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<sup>43</sup> Coullie, p. 138.

<sup>44</sup> Coullie, p. 135.

subject as ... one link in a 'chain of sisterhood.'<sup>45</sup> In Talent's case, it is also a 'chain of **humanity**'; her adult work is about uprooting poverty through education regardless of gender.

Lyndall Gordon's *Shared Lives* (1992) was less relevant for my project, but it was nevertheless interesting in that 'mutuality' was also the focus of the story of three Jewish girls growing up in the 1950s. Coullie concludes with the fact that '[a]utobiography in the western tradition, with the strong authorising 'I' gives way in these texts to the more fluid forms of auto/biography, forms which can more fruitfully fathom the nuances of mutuality.'<sup>46</sup> In her essay 'The century's daughters,' Lyn Pykett says 'that ... while male writers seek to challenge the authority of the past by deconstructing the idea of history and converting it into a series of fictions, female writers are more likely to seek to recuperate the past from a female perspective and make it tell a different story: her story not history.'<sup>47</sup>

What feminist theorists have achieved is to foreground the need for her/story by interrogating the binaries of male/female, objective/subjective, soul/body and so on that have undermined women for centuries. This bias has its roots in the western intellectual tradition; man is exalted as author and authority, poet and privileged to know the mind of God. This bias is at the heart of another social construct and that is race. Social Darwinism portrayed women as less than men and black women (and men) as lesser still, closer 'in fact' to the early primates than to the evolved white man who 'discovered' them.

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<sup>45</sup> Coullie, p. 141.

<sup>46</sup> Coullie, p. 145.

Talent was a very easy interviewee and the narrative flowed. I often found myself on the edge of my chair wondering just what ‘the wild man wound round with copper’ would do to them. My promptings were minimal and were mostly to keep the gender-focus - for example, I asked what it was like to grow up as a girl child, how it felt to be a woman in the Struggle and what it was like to be a woman in adulthood. I listened closely to her responses and would ask about aspects she brought up – for example, why her grandfather was different, whether dancing was part of the feminine chores and whether her faith in God comforted her in Botswana.

My editing took place in two stages; the first stage was to take out the repetitions that occur in conversation and the second was to do a grammatical edit so that tenses agreed. I have left Talent’s voice to speak for itself; her choice of words demonstrates a rich hybridity that comes from a fusion of European learning, an idiosyncratic response to situations and her Zimbabwean regional dialect.

Here are some pithy examples of her English (‘but not quite’<sup>48</sup>):

Pg 17/18. “Hey girls! Be liberated... Get some cigarettes.” That’s when my religious values **started knocking on my brain all over again**’ - much more evocative of her frame of mind than the conventional ‘came to the fore’

Pg 23. ‘We really **had to apply energy to lift one foot and follow it by another**. Those army boots were heavy.’ – ‘apply energy’ and ‘follow it’ underline the heaviness of the boot in a way ‘had to strain to lift one foot after the other’ cannot.

Pg. 36. ‘The instructors were specialists: they did not just pick Jack and Jill in the street.’ – this (mis)use of a nursery rhyme is so apt.

Pg. 28. ‘Not the kicking out, the English one, but really physical. Kick out. (!)’

Pg. 49. ‘I was really suffocating my energies [in my marriage]’ – making herself the subject is a much more effective way of saying ‘my marriage was smothering me.’ Here is an example of the influence of populist education jargon:

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<sup>47</sup> Critical Quarterly, Autumn, 1987, p. 77.

<sup>48</sup> Not, however, in Bhabha’s context of Sly Civility, in Location of Culture.



When a child is born without resources, unless somebody avails resources to mentally capacitate them, this child grows up to be a slave to other people, even if they are intelligent. (50)

In this description of the countryside, Talent's choice of adjectives (long, thorny) and her use of detail (carefully pluck ...and suck) is English at its best by any standard.:

It was a long walk ... almost two days' walk in thorny fields. ... There was no food, there was no water ... so we would take turns to carefully pluck leaves off a tree and suck the dew. (15)

It serves to heighten the reader's sympathy for this young girl's trauma with 'the worst lunatics' telling them to take off their white *pant* (the Zimbabwean regional dialect coming through!) so as not to be too visible to the helicopters overhead.

Another poignant example of Talent's use of her Zimbabwean heritage is the analogy of an everyday rural scene to underline the abnormality of the parent-child reunion in a military camp:

[like] a dairy when they put the cows out ... they would release three or four of us and we would have the whole multitude of parents crowding us, each of them trying to find out about their children. (19/20)

This passage is a fitting lead-in to the next chapter, which deals with identity construction and the role of motherhood in Africa.

### Chapter 3

#### Identity construction and African attitudes towards motherhood

Talent's identity and her worldview are evident from the very beginning of her story: 'but this is not to say you were envious of [prostitutes] – they were amongst the class of people who had their own life' (1). Talent's energies were, and still are, spent in (to use a colloquial expression) 'getting a life' and helping others to 'get a life' too. Raised 'by poor people's standards' (5), toiling with her cousin in the fields for school fees like any other 'subaltern,' Talent was more fortunate than most girl children because her grandfather was different. She admits her rebellious streak - 'never pinned to do what I did not believe' (2) - but her grandfather did not force her to prepare his snuff, nor to plough the fields (this was boys' work in his opinion). Her grandmother had reservations about her being able to cope with the walk to school in winter when she was only five, but she still let her go.

Her uncle not only laboured to send his four children and his niece to boarding school, but also had sufficient trust to allow Talent and his daughters to go off on youth camps. The fact that he is unusual is emphasized by Dangarembga's novel:

Babamakuru condemn[ed] Nyasha to whoredom, making her the victim of her femaleness... The victimization I saw was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition ... Men took it everywhere with them.<sup>49</sup>

Talent's family experience does not translate into the bitterness that the opening sentence of *Nervous Conditions* underlines – 'I was not sorry when my brother died.'<sup>50</sup> Dangarembga's Nhamo is one of those who 'gives a coerced consent to their status as agents of colonial hegemony: that status may ultimately be bad for them but they seek it

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<sup>49</sup> Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*, p. 115.

out because it offers privilege and they in turn participate in the double colonization of the women nearest them. The colonial system makes education scarce; sexism determines that boys shall have first access to it.’<sup>51</sup> Whilst Talent herself is not a victim of this double colonization, she makes the point of how the percentage of girls steadily dwindles until only a handful make it into Form I.

Talent’s recalling of the fact that there is something different about the first term of 1975<sup>52</sup> is an example of history-from-below. As a ‘colonizer’, I heard for the first time the discourse of the ‘other’ – the children are asked to watch a girl who wants to ‘go,’ who wants to join the comrades. The headmaster says to refer any and all enquiries about ‘the war’ to him. There is a contact; there are helicopters and planes; the gate is left unlocked and the girls rush out to see the action, as I’m sure any 14-year-old would. Talent’s skills as a raconteur come out in the dramatic tension of the bell for prayers being rung in a funny manner and by the children being confronted with a ‘wild’ man, his body rung round with the copper of bullets.

The propaganda machine had a different voice for these subalterns - the teacher is told to say that they ‘have not been taken from school [but] are a Youth Group that organised itself ...to join the Liberation Struggle’ (16). Talent hears for the first time ‘about this other side of the world where the people are supposed to be living equally, without racial discrimination’ (19). Talent and the group were wooed by the news that ZAPU would continue their education. They were encouraged to register. Even at a

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<sup>50</sup> Dangarembga, p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> Sugnet, Charles. ‘Nervous Conditions’, in Nnaemeka, O.(ed.), The politics of (m)othering: womanhood, identity and resistance in African Literature, p. 38.

<sup>52</sup> The first ‘terrorist’ incursion was in December, 1972; 24 months later and the war was hotting up.

young age and during such a negative experience, Talent's critical faculty was still working:

The comrades realised that [their propaganda] had not worked so well and so they decided to use threats ... If you decide to go back ... we'll just blow the buses up. ... We had two options. Either stay or go and die ... But you should have seen the parents crying. It was the most pathetic thing ... If we were given too much time to talk about these things then most of the children would obviously go back but they created an atmosphere that did not allow any discussions. (19/20)

The Manama group 'stayed', and were flown to Lusaka but the dominant emotion was still fear. Talent talks about the rumour that they would have to 'service' 15 soldiers **each**. Another rumour was that they would sign army contracts and be paid. 'I felt perhaps that I could live with that. But then to go home and kill – that also was another story. I didn't know how to handle that one' (22). The dominant factor in those refugee camps was the boot, a heavy boot. Talent recounts that there was no communication of the rules and that they learned the hard way – a sharp kick on the shins. Public punishment was juxtaposed with compliments of how 'cute' the child soldiers looked in the cast-off Chinese uniforms; 'fucking bourgeoisie' was the dominant phrase, but the fact that Talent remembers it so vividly indicates that it was a phrase she found offensive.

Talent picks up on the hypocrisy of it all. 'So this was the Liberation Struggle, the so-called heroic struggle? There is a lot of the inside story, of the real story, that is never told' (23). As I listened to her narrative I felt privileged to have been told, but I wonder when <sup>53</sup> it will be safe for Talent to publish her story. Flame <sup>54</sup> 'started people talking about the war [and that is a good thing] but if the reality of the situation had been shown,

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<sup>53</sup> Given the current climate of the almost deification of 'war veterans' and the Struggle.

<sup>54</sup> A film about the liberation struggle, released in 1991 and directed by Noel Phiri.

I don't think they would have allowed it to be shown. Worse things happened to the women than they show' (26). Fortunately for the Manama group, Joshua Nkomo<sup>55</sup> intervened and they were moved. The next camp turned out to be a more humane place although the initial impression was not helped by 'these female combatants ... demanding jewellery ... so people surrendered their [watches and earrings] never to recover [them] again in their whole lives' (26).

The narrative takes on a lighter note and comic relief serves to underline the painful reality:

The funniest part now was this thing of having new names ... I got a nice name Dudu [which means 'someone who comforts'] but some people got wild names like 'Prostitute Work Hard' ... None of us could remember our names (*laughs*) ... A big kick and then ... you would never forget it again. (27)

A few days later Talent was among ten people chosen to invent new names for others. Her amusement at the whole process comes out:

I tried to remember my cousins' names, my aunties' names, the names of everybody I've come across until I really ran out ... I got kicked out and that was okay ... Not the kicking out, the English one, but really physical. Kick out (27/28).

Although Talent makes light of this, the significance of naming is underlined by the fact that these girls could not remember their new names, that subconsciously they did not want a new identity.

Gender and identity theory demonstrates that we are all 'subjects in process,'<sup>56</sup> that identity is not fixed but flows and changes, but the way Talent acted on her environment is unchanging in two aspects : her high self-esteem – 'I was a woman

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<sup>55</sup> Leader of ZAPU; in 1981 he was made Vice President of Zimbabwe as part of the ZANU-PF Government of Unity.

<sup>56</sup> Kristeva speaks to Susan Sellers, in Eagleton, Mary (ed), p. 351

capable of making decisions. I could not be influenced just because it was a fragile situation' (21) - and her belief in empowerment through education:

Even if they beat me and kick me, I was just thinking "Ah well, perhaps this is what they call persecution" ... But then listen to what they did! ZAPU set up the most beautiful refugee school you could ever dream of in that camp ... but they would never acknowledge [my part] you know ... So I said to myself, 'Well, so what. What is important is that we finally got formal education in the camp.' And for me, I really felt good because a lot of even younger people started coming in and there was a school for them to go to. (23)

Talent is very modest about her own attributes: 'they were so clever those girls' (30) or were Salani and her peers 'so clever' because Talent made learning easy? Problem-solving comes naturally to her; '[i]t only occurred to me that perhaps it was not normal when I was summoned to explain'(31). Talent's focus is on helping people – 'this [evening classes] was the most human time ... [whereas] the day classes were full of violence and wild language' (31).

Talent also exemplifies the realisation of self through effective personal protest. She was feeling so dirty that she decided to wash without permission; she then faced the punishment. 'We were taken to the sewerage place ... first of all you tell yourself "I can't do it" and then you say "You can do it." I looked at the other two girls and said, "It is worse because this is women who are doing this to us"' (34). And they walked in up to their necks. That takes courage. The stench of that place, the physical feel of the sewerage must have engendered a reaction similar to the one Kristeva describes:

I experience [when presented with a glass of boiled milk] a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly; and all the organs shrivel up the body, provoke tears and bile, increase heartbeat, cause forehead and hands to perspire ...<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Powers of Horror, p. 3.

Fate intervened in the form of visitors to the camp and the girls were taken out of the sewers. Talent received medical treatment and was then transferred to military camp, which was a great improvement because there was a discipline to each day. Finally, the promise of education abroad was fulfilled and East Germany was a good experience. Here is an example of Bhabha's 'hybrid moment of political change;' <sup>58</sup> '[f]or the first time [I] really understood the purpose of the Liberation Struggle' (41). For the first time, too, Talent felt good about being a woman and about the potential for women in leadership.

Talent also feels that the good things about the communist countries are not given enough credit:

There was lots of good – the kindergarten schemes ... everybody had a house. It was not luxurious but everybody was under a roof and for me that was very, very important.' (42)

Talent's analytical abilities were honed as all her work experience had to be tested to see what would be applicable for Zimbabwe. Her debating abilities were also honed as students and lecturers discussed the question of Creation and agreed that 'it should be a question of the heart.' She observed that people were not allowed to own property and decides that something was missing from communist policies, 'People want to own things, they want to own a piece of land. They want to feel "this is mine"' (42/43). Although she was just a teenager, she was 'very excited to be abroad and to be part of lessons about the roles of people in society; about people only reap[ing] according to what they sow' (43).

Talent also continued to benefit from discussions about the news coming from her country and the rest of the world. For example, the Communists realised that Robert

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<sup>58</sup> Location of Culture, p. 27

Mugabe would be the British choice because he was ‘the most unorganised one’ (44) and therefore easier to manipulate. ‘Most of the polling boxes from the north of the country where ZAPU was in control got lost. How can a helicopter miss polling boxes?’ (45).

Talent’s political awareness was growing:

[In ZAPU] there was a lot of ... structures in place. That was not very pleasing for the colonisers because it would pose a threat [and] would probably introduce a true revolution. ... We made all those analyses. ... We also knew very well that Muzorewa was going to lose because even if he had access to the state machinery, the fact that he had posters all over the place was a clear sign that he was not going to win. Just as, when I was looking at Mugabe in last year’s elections I was so sure that the MDC was going to win in all the urban areas because that’s where ZANU intensified their campaign, that’s where you saw Mugabe’s face all over. I said “This guy’s not going to win. He might win in the rural areas where he has terrorised people, where people are afraid.” (44)

The war was over. Talent’s schooling was finished and she came home, but, like the Magi, she was to talk of the cold coming that she had of it. For the first time in the narrative, Talent did not feel good about herself. Had she travelled so far to witness not a birth but a death? <sup>59</sup>

You sort of feel really lost, a misfit. I did not see myself in any position that would be meaningful under those circumstances. Those people were very excited about ZANU and also there were so many killings in Matabeleland and it didn’t feel good to have been ZIPRA. It was a really terrible time, second to the experiences in the camps. (45)

Talent and her husband could not go back to Matabeleland – ‘most of the party leaders were already in exile ... my husband was then also being harassed’ (45) - and so what they did was to organise a co-operative farm outside Harare on which Talent started an education programme. Through a Canadian organisation, she studied Co-operative Theory and Popular Education for a year in Montreal but it was still not all plain sailing.



Her idealism was to find some frustration in the attitudes within the Co-operative Movement. People did not understand that the professional (planning) side of the programme is as important as the physical - 'Go to the fields, do your cultivation and then after that plan our lessons [and] come and teach us'(46). 'When do I have time to be with my children?' pleaded Talent and, once she realised that things were not going to change, she started looking around for another job.

A job came up with the Zimbabwe Foundation of Education with Production. For three years Talent was under the tutelage of a remarkable man, a man who was to become her major mentor. 'John Con (Conradie) said, "Well, if I throw you into a swimming pool that is deep, either you sink so deep and die or you swim and come across the decisions"' (46). Talent, of course, swam! 'John was really, really good. He left me to grow, to think for myself' (47). John had been imprisoned for nineteen years by the Smith Government 'but he was not happy with the system the way it was working and so he simply decided to go on with what he believed in' (47). A team was forming – Cathy, John, Lucia and Talent – that has had and will continue to have a huge impact on the hundreds of marginalised rural people.

Talent and the other women in the team seem to combine the public and the private sides of their lives in a balanced way. They personify Nnaemeka's word, *Ngambika*, which means 'help me to balance this load.' For Nnaemeka, (M)Othering in Africa exemplifies a 'forceful articulation of agency in victimhood [that] asks for assistance, not the removal of the load.'<sup>60</sup> In Africa, motherhood is not described in terms of a patriarchal institution but rather as an experience, ' (mothering) with its pains

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<sup>59</sup> To use the phraseology of TS Eliot in his poem *The Journey of the Magi*

<sup>60</sup> Nnaemeka, O (ed.),p.3.

and rewards.’<sup>61</sup> The daily letters and small treats that Talent left for each of her three children for every day that she was away from home are inspirational; her conscious programme to build awareness of issues of history and race is likewise inspirational. Here are ‘[t]he mother’s eyes ... that watched me ... so that if I faltered while learning to walk they would hold me up.’<sup>62</sup>

Alice Walker’s use of the word ‘Womanism’ rather than ‘Feminism’ underlines the toughness of Afro-American motherhood historically. One of Walker’s characters expresses what many African women may feel in a rigidly patriarchal society - ‘You have to git man off your eyeball.’<sup>63</sup> Talent does get the man who has been suffocating her energies off her eyeball, but she does so with minimal acrimony. (He was someone who gave more time to the Cause than to his family.) She also gets the comrades off her eyeball too:

I didn’t need to drink and smoke to prove that I was equal [with the males]. I wanted to prove it in the best way I knew how and that was by remaining true to myself.’ (20/21)

‘To be true to herself,’ not to be a victim, is to be someone very different from the image of African women that the world holds. Whilst acknowledging Bob Geldof’s good intentions, Nnaemeka regrets the media creation of the Woman of Africa, old beyond her years, half-naked, with drooping breasts and a begging bowl permanently in her outstretched hand - ‘[t]his is a sorry pass the daughters of the African continent have come to ... descendants of Nefertiti and Cleopatra,’<sup>64</sup> of Mbuya Nehanda and

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<sup>61</sup>Nnaemeka, O (ed.), p.5.

<sup>62</sup> A quote from Peter Hitchcock, Nnaemeka, O (ed.) p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> The Colour Purple, p. 171.

<sup>64</sup> Nnaemeka, O, (ed), Sisterhood, feminisms, and power: from Africa to the diaspora, p. 39/40.

Nzingha.<sup>65</sup> Nnaemeka queries whether ‘the desperate hag’ of the media (western) is an accurate symbol but if it is ‘she is the result of the last five hundred years’ encounter with the West, the last one hundred years of repression.’<sup>66</sup>

Talent’s story gives flesh to what are seen as the three major historical factors influencing the position of the African women today - indigenous African societal patterns, the conquest of the continent by Europe and the apparent lack of vision, of courage, in the leadership of the postcolonial (post-independence) period. ‘All this should be enough to make the African woman ... keel over, and just die. However, ... she is still pushing.’<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Prophetesses hanged/beheaded in Rhodesia and Mocambique respectively in the early twentieth Century.

<sup>66</sup> A quote from Ama Ata Aidoo, Naemeka, O (ed. ) p. 42.

## Chapter 4

### Human Rights: as refugees and as citizens

One of the aspects of Talent's story that is 'stranger than fiction' was the brutality in the refugee camp. '[I]n the dark halls of the museum that is now what remains of Auschwitz 3,' says Kristeva, 'I see a heap of children's shoes ... the abjection of Nazi crime reaches its apex when death ... interferes with childhood.'<sup>68</sup> Talent's swollen eyes and worm-ridden body are minimal by comparison, but she was only 14 years old and she had been abducted from school and her suffering had been at the hands of 'comrades', women ostensibly on the same side. Such was the interference with her childhood that UNCR saw fit to intervene.

The question is, why were the female comrades so hard on their own sex? Talent has found no explanation. A thorough database search for woman-on-woman brutality in Liberation armies drew a blank and so I turned to the various texts on Embodiment. Grosz<sup>69</sup> opens her chapter on 'Nietzsche and the Choreography of Knowledge' with this quote from the slave to Antipholus in the *Comedy of Errors* – 'If the skin were parchment and the blows you gave me were ink ...' and goes on to say that the social inscriptions of the surface of the body generate a psychological interiority. The 'hard kick' culture in the ZAPU camps operated in the same way.

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<sup>67</sup> Aidoo, Naemeka, O (ed. ), p. 48.

<sup>68</sup> Kristeva, Julia, Powers of Horror, p. 4.

Our conversation was the first time Talent had publicly 'remembered' the trauma although she and her cousin had talked about their experiences and the lump on her bottom that resulted from the injection needle that the camp doctor 'threw' at her was always a momento from the camps that she 'laughed' about. What happened in Lusaka brings to mind Kafka's phrase that 'without cruelty, there is no festival.'<sup>70</sup> Picture a group of 'scared-to-death' pubescent girls arriving to join the Struggle and being greeted by this spectacle: 'Some were like monkey-walking, some like snake-walking, some were like frog-walking. I didn't realise at first that this was a punishment. ...then they started bashing up this woman, screaming "there's no fucking in this place"' (22). Talent tells us that 'the female comrades are too cruel;' she also identifies a motive –'they are too jealous even ... The [female comrades] had very little education most of them ... It's a funny thing. I have not found anyone who can explain that kind of hatred that is founded on education' (28).

The link between education and the Struggle is made right from the point of abduction. Their liberator tells them that 'that is why we have taken you. We will need educated people in Free Zimbabwe' (18). The male soldiers respected them for their education but there is frequent reference to them earning their place –'You want us to fight so you can run the country?' (14). The relationship between education or, rather, the lack of it, and the wrath of the female comrades-in-charge recurs, as we see in the next incident.

Talent's most traumatic moment came at the second refugee camp. There was insufficient water in the camp and she and two other girls had sneaked away to wash.

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<sup>69</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth, Volatile Bodies, p. 120.

<sup>70</sup> Grosz, p.134.

This provided glee all round for the comrades in charge. They spat in their faces, they made them roll in red mud and they blew the whistle for all to come and watch. Here is spectacular punishment, the public torture of Europe before 1820.<sup>71</sup> ‘Ah those *fundis*,<sup>72</sup> they are giving us a problem ... And we were taken to the kitchen sewerage – a dark, dark place and all those [rotten] foods were there and all these worms, the big ones with tails on’ (33/34). They had to walk up to their necks in this latrine and who knows how long they would have been made to stay there if visitors had not arrived. Next morning Talent’s eyes were so swollen that she could not see and the foreign doctors she finally got treatment from said she was lucky not to lose her sight.

Can jealousy explain this level of abuse? David Kopf argues that ‘power is the primary human need’<sup>73</sup> and presumably these comrades felt their powerlessness; they lacked that crucial ingredient of modernity, literacy. They were also desperate for power – after all, that is what the liberation struggle was all about – to the point where they would exercise it even upon their own comrades.

It says a lot about the human spirit of survival that Talent can say, after their evening classes were discovered:

I had been kicked so many times, I suppose that was supposed to tell me that I was stupid, that I did things that were wrong. In my heart I believed so much that I had done something that was so right. Were these people not human beings in the way I know human beings? (32)

The much-vaunted ‘sisterhood of women’ is given two faces in this story. There is the inhumanity of the female guerrillas who tormented the younger girls: whether they

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<sup>71</sup> Spectacular punishment based on revenge versus the modern disciplinary punishment which aims for the redemption of the criminal: references to Foucault in Grosz, p.150

<sup>72</sup> Derived from the Nguni word, *funda*, to study.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Subaltern Studies,’ Journal of the American Oriental Society, Jan 1991, p.192.

did this out of a sense of powerlessness or out of the primary human need to wield power, they did it.<sup>74</sup> Then there is the humanity of cousin supporting cousin, firstly Talent helping her less-sporty cousin on the forced march and then that cousin feeding her when her eyes were so sore that she screamed if she had to open them. There is also the sisterhood of the ‘privileged’ mission girls sharing their knowledge with their sisters in the camp.

The catalyst in the evening classes in 1975 is still a catalyst for change twenty years later; in 1996, it was Talent who identified the need for books in Zimbabwe. ‘[W]e went to this secondary school and a child in Form III<sup>75</sup> could not use a dictionary; my son who was in Grade IV<sup>76</sup> could already use one. There was one atlas for the whole school. I started thinking around this’ (49). Her thinking moved onto a solution and the first person to buy into the idea of books for schools and for people in remote villages was Doris Lessing.<sup>77</sup>

As support grew, ADBT was formed:

...in the first year we had more than 1000 requests. We went to the commercial farms because I was looking at areas where nobody really cares because I told myself that when a child is born without resources, unless somebody avails resources to mentally capacitate them, this child grows up to be a slave to other people, even if they are intelligent. (50)

Talent saw the contrast between the well-funded urban schools and the appallingly equipped rural schools and she believed the cause was ‘a lot of fear amongst the ruling class [who were] grooming generations of slaves’ (50).

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<sup>74</sup> Nnaemeka, O (ed.) quotes: ‘perpetrators of widow’s sad plight are women, just as are the circumcisors,’ M(O)thering, p.56.

<sup>75</sup> Standard 8.

<sup>76</sup> Standard 2.

<sup>77</sup> The Book Team is referred to on page 351 in African Laughter.

Talent's generosity as a human being was so palpable at this point. I could not help but contrast her zeal to empower the educationally disadvantaged with my own lack of action as a member of the previously empowered community. The next chapter outlines some of the aspects of my 'privilege' that this conversational narrative caused me to re-examine.

## Chapter 5

### The 'author's' perspective

In her essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak' Spivak<sup>78</sup> does a brilliant expose of *suttee/sati* as 'the white man trying to save the brown women from the brown men' but of how, because of his S/subject position, he in fact reduces the Indian women's spiritual freedom into a perverted westernised 'good woman' issue. Her rewrite of a social text, the 'suicide' of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, in an interventionsit way highlights the value judgements inherent in 'our' (white, western) understanding of things past and present. Here are some of the social texts that I was to re-interrogate in the process of writing Talent's story:

**Woman is womb:** Child-bearing is a reference point for 'third world' women in a way that it is not for their 'first world' sisters. Talent did not dare to ask for a bra because that would be a sign that she was no longer a virgin. Menstruating girls were separated from non-menstruating girls in Botswana; menstruation was a key question prior to Talent's departure to East Germany and when she replied in the negative, the doctor's response was: '[y]ou should already have given birth!' (40). Child-bearing is tied in with the whole *lobola* system and infertility is sufficient cause for a man to take a second wife.

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<sup>78</sup> pp 93-104.



**Specific areas and conditions on farms:** The fact that Rhodesia voted against becoming the fifth province of South Africa in 1923 was always a source of pride among the whites; Rhodesia/Zimbabwe was not like the Republic (although that came much later) and it did not institutionalize apartheid. Yet I have to acknowledge the facts - ‘specific areas for each group of people [to trade in]’<sup>(8)</sup> and the 1930 Land Apportionment Act, with separate but not equal tracts of land. Commercial (white) farmers are given credit for the fact that farm schools are responsible for 45% of literacy <sup>79</sup> in Zimbabwe – yet it is these same schools that Talent targets for her Library project: ‘I was looking at areas where nobody really cares’ (50).

**Only the native can know the scene**<sup>80</sup>: Talent and I were living in the same Independence-era in Zimbabwe and yet most of the whites had no idea of the genocide, the *gukurahanda* as it is now called. Thanks to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and to author Peter Godwin,<sup>81</sup> the facts of the killings in Matabeleland came to light in the mid-1990s, but how many know people know about Matabele youths being forced to fight in the Congo as recently as 2001? This serves to underline the continued silencing of the ‘other,’ whether subaltern or minority grouping. If one counts the headlines that have been printed about the tragedies of white farmers over the equally unspeakable misery of the faceless, voiceless masses, Talent’s story and others like hers scream to be told. I only hope they find a caring listener.

**Communist/Christian:** I had never bought into the hysteria that was McCarthyism but, equally, I had not appreciated how much good there was to be found in historical

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<sup>79</sup> Professor Bill Louw at the U.Z. Symposium.

<sup>80</sup> Gayatri Spivak, in Eagleton, Mary (ed.), p. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Godwin, P, Mukiwa.

materialism – a lack of racism and sexism, the kindergartens, housing for all and a belief that every language has the same value.

Talent's strong church background - 'I used the Old Testament to raise my children'(53) - puts me in mind of an aspect of Zimbabwean 'sisterhood' that I remember vividly; the blue and red outfits worn by women on the traditional 'half-day-off', Thursday, when the Mother's Union (Methodist and Anglican or Catholic) came together in church halls all over the country.

**UBUNTU:** <sup>82</sup> Talent's admiration of and love for John Conradie (and of Cathy Bond-Stewart, Doris Lessing, Anthony Chennells and many others) was a salutary reminder of the fact that there is perhaps as much for the white race to be proud of as to be ashamed of. Talent's magnanimity - "'The white man must go; we need black government.'" That bit I didn't really care about' (12) – was by no means unique, but was very evident in the forgiving nature of the man-in-the-street in post-Independence Zimbabwe, while her reaction to the liberation talk - '[but] I detested the idea of taking everything from everybody' (12) – humbled me. Would I have been so moral?

I liked and admired Talent before interviewing her but that liking and admiration grew exponentially after 'writing' her story. I value the intimacy it brought to our friendship and the graciousness with which she left me to work through the deconstruction of my her/history. Talent, for her part, is very pleased to have her story 'in print' and feels that the narrative 'captured 98% of the conversation we had.' <sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> In the TRC sense of 'common humanity.'

### **Postscript**

Bozzoli refers to Gramsci and to how the ‘conscious [is] formed within and against [hegemonic] structures.’<sup>84</sup> The question of agency, of ‘how much of our lives is determined for us and how much by us ... depending on where we stand in relation to social power,’<sup>85</sup> is obviously relevant to the postcolonial situation that Talent was born into and to the post-independence scenario she returned to.

More fortunate than most ‘third world’ girls in her early years, Talent maximised her opportunities, always with an eye to what would benefit her country, regardless of tribal grouping or gender ‘classification.’ Talent is an inspirational example of someone ‘never to be pinned down to do what I did not believe.’ (2) She is no ‘copycat white’<sup>86</sup> but, rather, an eclectic mix of her experiences both good and bad, both in Africa and abroad. She is Mother Africa.

Her mission is to ‘make sure that these subjects of the ruling class can also grow out of being subjects and be themselves.’ (51) Bhabha, Mohanty and Spivak would all

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<sup>83</sup> After repeated death threats, Talent has gone underground but I spoke to her on the phone at the end of November, 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Bozzoli, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> Bozzoli, p. 2.

endorse what this woman sees as the great need of her people. The history-from-below also has to be told because ‘what minority groups are entitled to have from scholars is a revised portrait, but one with warts and all.’<sup>87</sup> ZAPU’s revised portrait certainly includes some warts as does ZANU’s record after Independence.

I last saw Talent in August 2002, when ADBT were hosting an international workshop in Cape Town and characteristically her heart’s cry was for the increased numbers of those dying from that ‘plague that comes to end all human hopes’<sup>88</sup> now that food is so scarce.

One of the ACPD posters to come out of the workshops on Leadership in 2001 featured an old Ndabele saying, ‘Caterpillars move on – there are no leaves left.’ This is an example of the pithy language that ‘unmasks the power relations of their world.’<sup>89</sup> ACPD’s work continues. Talent’s work continues.

I hope to persuade someone<sup>90</sup> to write the film script for this story so that this daughter of Zimbabwe’s voice and actions can speak for the subaltern in a way that written texts never can.

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<sup>86</sup> Fanon’s phrase.

<sup>87</sup> Rich, Paul. ‘Subaltern sombrero studies: underclasses get notice.’ Journal of Interamerica Studies & World Affairs, Summer, 1997, p. 187.

<sup>88</sup> Nnaemeka, O (ed.), Sisterhood, p. 42.

<sup>89</sup> Barbara Christian in Eagleton, Mary (ed) p. 275

<sup>90</sup> I was fortunate to have a short interview with Tsitsi Dangarembga in October 2000; she had started her thesis on the narrative (cinematic) voice and her vision is to portray the true discourses of Africa.

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### **A story that would Otherwise not have been told<sup>91</sup>**

I was born in Mberengwa, southern Zimbabwe, on the 25<sup>th</sup> November 1961. Like every other Zimbabwean you end up with two birthdays! (*laughs.*) Mostly it's because a mistake was made elsewhere, but in my case, I went to school a year early and in those years they would insist that when you take the Grade VII exam, you would have to be the right age. So they had to reverse my age and put January in place of November in the same year just to make sure that I take the Grade VII exam.

What I remember most about being a girl-child was that when you are with the grannies, with the old people, they referred to you as *kamuhure* which simply means 'the little prostitute.' In their opinion, a woman would grow up to be nothing more than a sexual object to produce children. Especially when they were drunk, they would just refer to you as, 'Oh, where's that little prostitute, that *kamuhure*?'

When they were saying those things, I did not get disturbed. It was just like one of those phrases that people used to describe you. And I remember sometimes they were discussing about education and they would say, 'You know, the girl just needs to go as far as writing a letter to the boyfriend so that she will not have to look for someone to read their letters. That would be enough. And then after that they get married or become prostitutes.'

I guess during the times when I was young, prostitutes were some of the so-called independent and rich women. They owned property in their own right and they were wealthy from what they got from sleeping with men. They had status as prostitutes. I remember some of the prostitutes that used to come home at Christmas; they were the

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<sup>91</sup> As this is Talent's voice, I only use quotation marks when she refers to what someone else said.

most beautiful ladies in the area and their children wore very decent, smart clothes throughout schooling. They never walked barefoot: they were always in tennis shoes or smart shoes. So then you would say, ‘Ah, this child is a child of a prostitute. This child is so smart!’ You see. (*laughs*) But this is not to say that you were envious of them - they were just amongst the class of people who had a life of their own.

Talent moves on to a different point but the notion of ‘having a life of one’s own’ is picked up later.<sup>92</sup>

I had always been an outgoing child. I would never be pinned to do what I did not believe. This caused a lot of problems for me. For instance, my grandfather used to smoke the fine tobacco - what do you call it? - yes, snuff. He would ask me to bring the half-clay pot he used to process it. So in order to fix me, my grandfather would say, ‘Bring my stone. Bring my water. Bring my bicarbonate of soda (because they would mix it with that) and then bring my clay pot as well.’ I was really getting fed up, so I took everything and put it in my skirt, the water and everything, and I went in front of him and just threw everything at his feet.

He was so angry (*chuckles*) and he really gave me a beating, but that also helped me get liberated from that business. From then on he didn’t want to send me to prepare his snuff things again because he knew that I would mess things up. So he decided to ask the boys, which was really good. I would say my grandfather demonstrated some limited signs of liberation compared to people of his generation. We never fetched the firewood. We never fetched water. According to my grandfather, that was the duty for boys. The boys would always get onto the scotch carts and they would get the firewood and they would get the water. This was a routine for other girls but it was never a routine for us. And we would never go to plough in the fields because my grandfather said that was a man’s job.

Was your grandfather very different from other grandfathers? Was this because you were Ndebele? Why was it?

I think he was different because he was a spirit medium. He got most of his wealth from fortune telling and from traditional healing practices and so he was amongst the really rich people in the village. He was from my mother’s side. From my father’s

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<sup>92</sup> *Italics* indicate my questions or comments.

side, I don't remember much because I'm only informed now that my parents separated when I was a very small girl. So I can't tell a story from my father's side because I grew up under my grandfather and my grandmother.

As a girl, when these other boys would beat me up or something happened that I didn't really like, I would always tell myself, 'When I grow up, you know, I will show these people that I'm not what they think I am. And then the turning point actually came when we went to school. I had a brother, a cousin, a brother from my mother's sister, who didn't want to go to school. He didn't really like going to school because school was a little bit of a distance from where we were. So he used to hide and to gather wild fruits on the way and he tried to lure me into eating these fruits and I would always leave him behind.

That's one thing I still remember, I enjoyed going to school so much. I really loved school. It was like I didn't look forward to the end of the day. I was looking forward to the beginning of the day. I did not understand the holidays even because I was having so much fun in school. My school was in Mberengwa and they called it Sangwa Primary School. It's in the heart of Mberengwa and it was one of those missionary-established schools, established in this case by the Lutheran Church.

My grandmother thought I was too young to go to school and that eventually I would fall off, especially in winter. She just said 'Ah, let her go. When winter comes, she will fall off.' But I didn't. I cried every day because it was cold. But I would cry my way to school (*laughs*) but when I came back everything would be okay. Every morning I started off by crying but I would never stop going to school! So then by the time I got into Grade VII, they had to reverse my birth certificate so that I could take the exam. Otherwise I would have been asked to wait a year longer.

Once I was able to read and write, we had what was called in the Lutheran church Sunday school, which was Bible Studies for the young people who were not yet youth. And that I loved. I memorised verses - I really used to love that. By the time I was in Grade V,<sup>93</sup> I was already a Sunday School teacher which was really, really good. And my uncle and I made great friends because of that. There I was teaching these kids who could not read or write, small ones, three to four years old, the Lord's Prayer. That was

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<sup>93</sup> Aged 10

wonderful for me. Just doing the stories of the Israelites and the stories of Jesus with these young children was really something. I enjoyed having them repeat or recite some of the verses and it was really, really good. I think that was the beginning of my wanting to work with people. I never found myself running out of enthusiasm. I would go and try to find other stories, try to find summarised versions of Jesus of Nazareth's parables and everything. I would really; that was just the best moment of my childhood.

And your family were fine about it, were they? I mean your grandfather, who was a traditional healer, wasn't cross about it? There was never conflict like that?

I will tell you what. My grandfather died when I was in Grade II. When he died - you know these childhood feelings - I was so happy. I said, 'Ha! Grandfather is dead. By the time he comes back I will be a grown woman, he will be so proud of me.' *(laughs)* And so I celebrated my grandfather's death with the spirit that he was going to come back and find me a grown woman and I would be showing him all these things that I was going to do, you know? I was so looking forward to his coming back. I didn't realise that he was gone, that he was finished.

So by this time that I was doing the Sunday school teaching, I was only with my grandmum and my uncle and my aunt. My uncle was also a Lutheran, a church pastor, so spiritually he was very happy that I was doing these things. And he was full of encouragement. In the Youth Movement, we did a lot of things. We joined the Evangelism Movement and we went from one home to another preaching and working for the elderly, the old women who didn't have people to help them.

For example, as a group of young women we used to agree that this weekend we were going to go to this home - we would spend time, we would clean the yard, we would sweep, we would do the best that we could under these circumstances to make sure that this old lady is relieved of the pressures. And we would do that. That's one thing that I think is so good about the Bible. It is a kind of Constitution for Life? You tap a lot of things from the Bible that you apply into life that are really meaningful. So we used to do that as a group of young women in the Youth Movement.

And then, Grade VII came and we took the exams. In those years you really had to make it, otherwise there was no possibility of a place in Form I. And I made it. Then we started looking for places. It was hectic, you know. During those years it was difficult to secure a place in Form I. My first place was at Endube Secondary School, a place in

Kwa-Bulawayo. It was what was referred to as an F2 institution. When I look back on it, it should have been the norm for education because it combined skills and academic studies. But in those days they were looked down on as schools for children who are not very academically gifted. I was not happy.

I wanted to move also because I did not like Kwa-Bulawayo. I was not raised in the urban areas. Everything was so new for me. The people I was living with treated us well, but it was still a whole new culture for me. I did not understand waking up, getting onto the bus, going to school and getting into another bus and going back home. It was a whole new thing for me. I enjoyed being in school but I did not enjoy the travel hecticness. We worked on my transfer and then I went to Manama Mission in Gwanda.

Manama was a boarding school. In primary school you find so many girls, more than boys, but as you go on to Grades IV & V, the number of girls decreases and so by Grade VII we were like ten girls and twenty-three boys. In Form I you find the number of girls has shrunk and you have more boys. The effect? Both at home and in the school, you were nothing but a woman. There was this theory amongst boys that if a girl is clever, the boys would concentrate on seducing her, pretend that they love her and then they say when a girl is so much in love she loses the potential to study because she's concentrating on this godly founded figure - (*laughs*) you know that kind of thing. (Un)fortunately, I wasn't amongst those. The boys that used to chase me up found that either I would take that letter home or I would report them to my cousins and they would be in more trouble than they thought they would put me into. (*laughs*)

And also during those days, you know, you would become a celebrity in the village if you found a place to go to Form I. For them to make it at Grade VII, and to get a place - everybody would be talking about you in the village. 'You know that girl? Of so and so? She now has a place at boarding school?' And they would start seeing you as a person who is already successful in life. Just by securing a place to do Form I. People would really make an effort to greet you, to ask you how school was. You know the community was one. They would ask my cousin and I (we were at the same boarding school) how school was, how you were doing. The first Sunday after you came back from school, you know everybody greets all our children that are back from school and you

would really feel good about it. You would feel, 'Well, I have made it'. Just by securing a place at Form I and being in Form I. Yes, it was wonderful feeling.

We were not raised even by middle-class standards, we were raised by poor people's standards. As a clergyman in the Lutheran Church, my uncle wasn't getting much. But he had projects. He would keep pigs and we would work so hard in the fields. We would work so hard. We did work in the fields, to cultivate. (The only thing that we girls didn't do was to plough.) We used to work so hard in the fields during the holidays because we knew that the income that paid for our school fees came from these crops. He was - the poor man was getting, I think it was, less than 25 pounds per month - and how many of us were in boarding school? His four children. Myself. There were five of us in boarding school. I really don't know how he made it, but he did make it.

At one point in time I remember volunteering to do some work at the Bible school when the clergymen came for training. I went there to cook and to assist in everything that was happening and I earned myself some money and I was very proud to have earned it. I also remember that one holiday I took a Biblical course at the Bible School with the Youths and I did so well that the principal in the school offered to pay my school fees. So Mr Svenssen started writing cheques for my school fees which was really, really good because I felt like, well, in one way I had demonstrated my ability too and I was not only studying, I was also working. I joined this youth group that was studying so I was studying part-time and then when we did the exams, I really excelled, they could not believe it. Lars Svenssen started writing cheques for my education because of what I had done in the Bible School course.

Talent, I've asked you how you felt as a girl-child. How did you feel as a black girl-child? Was black-ness something you grew up with, or when did you start to know you were black and other people were white, or did you never have a problem with it?

You know, this blackness thing comes when you meet white people. Before you meet them, as a child in the rural areas, well, it was too distant to even think about it but when I started working part-time with the Bible School, I realised that I was of a black

race. In those times, you came <sup>94</sup> to believe that white skin is super skin. A lot of people during those times when I was growing up envied to be white and so they applied the lotion, 'skin toning lotion'? They called it Ambi. You apply it and your skin changes; it becomes whitish. In those years they just did it on the face and on the neck and so you would find this girl who is so white on the face but with very black hands (laughs) - So I didn't bother!

I never bothered. I didn't like it. Not at all. Also my uncle was very discouraging of those lotions. "It's okay when you are young, but when you grow old, this thing eats you up. So I don't want to see anybody applying these skin-toning lotions," he used to say.

But what used to happen, even if you were at a missionary centre, white children were white children, Pauline, whether they were missionaries or not and even in the name of God, they remained white. You see, that's the other thing, what does that mean? They remained white. Does that mean they remained aloof, I mean, what does that mean? The system was such that you have to feel your blackness and they have to feel their whiteness, you know? You get this person who is a white missionary with children, and perhaps this black child messes up with their children's toy, they would go like 'African!', you know? So you would know that when they go '**African!**' it means 'black people' in a hurtful way. You want to retort and say 'Oh and by the way I'm black.'

*The story continues.*

We had this cousin who was teaching. She started bringing these tapes from the liberation struggle and she would put them under her pillow. All of us, my male cousin and my female cousin, we would put our head on this pillow and listen to the Voice of Zimbabwe which would be broadcasting from somewhere out of the country and people would be singing and so forth.

What I came to<sup>95</sup> believe myself during those times was that **these** were terrorists, people who didn't care. We as young people were discussing it. "These are terrorists - people who don't care about others, people who want to take away everything that others have which they don't have." It was very extreme. A woman would not belong to one

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<sup>94</sup> Talent here and elsewhere actually said 'meant to'; it is obvious from the context that it is a conclusion. Talent herself came to and so I have substituted 'came to.'

man - "You, every man would just have you as and when they wish." You can imagine; those were the interpretations that we got. We would listen to this Voice of Zimbabwe – "Zimbabwe, we have to liberate ourselves! Come and join the struggle," but then the discussions that would take place amongst ourselves after that were so negative. I really did not want to have anything to do with this so-called Liberation struggle because it was a struggle to take away things that we, that other people had worked for, to give them to people who did not work for them at all. It was like encouraging people to engage themselves in a stealing process and I really did not like that.

Also they were saying that it's only boys who can go, not girls and so I, we, went on with our schooling. We would go to school and come back home and because we were a very Christian-Christian, religious family; sometimes issues of being women-women were discouraged but at the same time you still have to remain a woman and play your role. You had to do all the things that women do.

And in school, the girls' dormitories were surrounded by chicken fence wire? (*laughing*) So that you really cannot escape from these dormitories! And the gate would be locked and opened at specific times. (*'Same with me at school!' I interrupt.*) And the boys were in that open space where they had all the freedom to do what they wanted. You would look at that and you would say, 'Ah! Are we really this bad? Do we need this kind of protection from boys?' The boys would even go drinking. The most embarrassing times for the girls was when they would have to ask the boys to go and get them cotton wool. (*Laughs*) And then they would come back with this cotton wool, give to the girl and then they would say, 'We know that you are on', and this kind of thing. It's so embarrassing for a girl (*laughing*) for all the boys to know that you are 'on'!

Also at this boarding school you would be mixed with the children of the really rich. Oh yes, rich, rich, rich! Children from stinking rich families. They were allowed to bring food and these girls would bring tinned food and they open it in the dining room when everyone is seated around the table. They would put it in their plate, scoop it in their spoon and ask you to pass it on to this other child, another daughter of a rich somebody. And you, you are eating school food and they are sort of saying to you, 'you eat these things because you are inferior.' They would bring their food in front of other

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<sup>95</sup> As above.



kids and then they ask the other kids to pass on the food to other kids. Imagine not even having the courtesy of trying you out to say ‘Would you like some of this?’ Those were girls against other girls.

There were these black business people. They had a lot of shops all over the place, the consumer trading shops, many and well stocked. I think they formed partnerships with either Asians or other people, with Indians like Patel and these other people. These black people were entrusted with running the businesses because the Indians were not allowed to invest in the rural areas. There were specific areas for each group of people, I think.

*(I didn't know that.)*

Ja! You would never find an Indian shop at the so-called growth points, which they could have done if they were allowed to. So, I actually believe that they had these partnerships, with these people, because I could not figure out the source of the wealth.

It made you feel poor. In those boarding schools, you could feel your class position because you didn't have much. My auntie used to just roast peanuts and salt them and we would gather them and that would take us through the term because it was just a handful of peanuts every day for me and my cousin. That was okay - we didn't see anything wrong with it, but now, when I look at the whole system, it was very manipulated. Some of these rich kids could not even wash their clothes - they could not even iron. They depended heavily on other children. I remember this one girl saying to me, ‘Can you wash my tennis shoes? I will give you a slice of bread in turn.’ So I took her tennis shoes, I went outside and I packed them with a lot of mud, I really made them dirty. I found cow dung and I smeared them all over and then I took these tennis shoes to her. She didn't ask me again. *(Laughing)* When I brought the tennis shoes to her she said, ‘Why didn't you wash them?’ I said, ‘Well, I don't like your bread and what makes you think that I could live off your slice of bread and have to wash your tennis shoes? I don't like your bread, and the way that your shoes look now is how I feel about you asking me to wash your shoes.’

Nobody ever asked me to do anything again. We also formed some kind of tribal cliques in this school. You would find people from Plumtree, the Kalanga region, and then there were people from Gwanda who were the Basutu: there were Venda and

perhaps the Matabele themselves. Then there were us from the Midlands and all over the country who might have been the Mashona people. These tribal cliques showed themselves in the way people organised themselves in the school.

*Was that a positive or a negative thing?*

It was both, it was both. You shared and understood yourselves as a people and a culture. You would share those sentiments but the negative things that happened with that was that there was a lot of bullying. If your clique did not have a real bully, you would be bullied by everyone else, you see? The opposite was true too: it would protect those of us who were very young and fragile from being bullied by the other big girls because they would then be afraid of the bully in your tribe.

In school they would always assume that girls perform lower than boys. In most cases those were the assumptions but it wasn't the reality. I can see even now that the girls excel more than boys. The performance just depended on the individual. The boys would go like, 'I don't want to be beaten by a girl.' 'How can they be better - a woman!?' You know? 'How can I be beaten?' So they had this macho man spirit that 'I am a man. I must demonstrate my manhood.' Us girls also wanted to demonstrate that there was nothing so special about being a man because we would actually excel, we could (*clap*) 'beat you up!'

And did you continue to shine, Talent?

Yes I did. I loved school! I've never loved anything more than school. But then when you go to secondary school, boarding school, the competition is tough. There are so many of you and you really have to fight. You really have to pull your way through. So I continued to pull myself through, and I wasn't in the middle or in the low, I was above. So, that really made me feel good, and I was looking forward to a good life. I told myself, 'Okay, I'm not going to be a school teacher because every woman goes to school to be a teacher. I'm not going to be a nurse because I want to do something different.' I told myself I would like to be different. Not to be the routine thing because I was tired of being told that I was a woman. I told myself these stupid things - I thought the air hostess was the one who was in charge of the 'plane - but (*laughs*) it was actually a worse position than a nurse. Then I dumped that idea. (*laughing*) And then I said, 'Ja, well...!' Perhaps I could just find myself in charge of big monies. I would be in charge of a bank.

Or whatever - I was imagining myself in charge of big things, where a lot of men would come to me (*laughs*) and where I would be telling men what to do. I said, 'If I am a teacher I would be a principal. (*laughing*) I didn't want to be a teacher, I would be in charge of the school!' So, I told myself all those things.

There was also another life during the holidays. Most of the days, as I have already said, we would cultivate in the fields but we had also time to work as the Youth Group in the church. I was very, very active. We would always organise plays to stage for specific seasons - we had plays for Easter, we had plays for Christmas, we had plays for Thanksgiving. A lot of things. We would go camping and it was really, really nice, I enjoyed that. Most parents would not let their girls go off camping because they would tell themselves, 'These girls will come back pregnant,' but with me, there was never a time when my uncle told himself that I would come back pregnant because I was such an open child that they would know if I had done something, I would just show (*laughs*). He let me go where I wanted to go and I would always come back. He treated his daughters just the same.

My grandmother used to tell us these stories of abstinence, of how it is important for a girl to remain a virgin until they get married. We were made to<sup>96</sup> believe that men respect a girl more if she is a virgin ('*I was told the same!*') and if they found that you were no longer a virgin, they could actually divorce you on those grounds and it would be such an embarrassment. So it never occurred to me when I was growing up to experiment with sex. It was out because then, who would marry me if I sleep with a man who will not marry me, you see? We were taught to value our virginity so much and even the boys had the same kind of thing. The teaching was not only for girls because boys would have nobody to sleep with also, you see?

I think perhaps we need to go back to that kind of education? I don't know. It might not work because of the modern technologies that are around now. Perhaps we really need to focus on that because it worked on me.

As a girl you would not wear a bra because your breasts would not need it when you are a virgin because they are supposed to stay intact! (*both laugh*) I mean, that's the theory they gave us. If you had big ones then they would say that you had had sex with

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<sup>96</sup> meant to/made to as discussed previously.

somebody. *(Both laughing. 'Terribly difficult if you had big boobs!')* Yes, it was very, very difficult and so you would never ask for a bra. You would just get away with a petticoat, and *underpant* - bras were out! You didn't need one because you were a teenager. What do you need it for? You would see other girls in boarding schools with bras, but I never wore a bra in the boarding school. I didn't have the guts to ask for one even if I admired these other girls with bras. If I'd asked for one they would really think I was no longer a virgin, you see? *(Laughs)* It was not good. It was not a good feeling.

We spent most of our time doing the ordinary chores that are supposedly feminine - you clean, you cook, you wash, you dress up, and all those things.

*Dance?*

Not much really. I have never been a party person. When people organised parties to have fun, I found myself not wanting to have that kind of fun. I would go to the Youth Camp but when they organised the dance groups and these other things, that were like just having fun, I would not be part of it. I still find it - I'm not a party person. Even now if someone invites me to the party, I find it so difficult; I could not dance. I have never danced in my life.

*Really? I thought, all African woman could dance!*

A lot of them can dance, but I am one of those who cannot even lift a foot.

*I saw that with the Tswana people at Soluzi, that some of the girls loved it more than the others. Some of them you would have got onto the dance floor.*

*(Talent laughs.)* Yes, you see! Perhaps the turning point, the second turning point, was that of being taken out during the Liberation Struggle. There was this girl in our dormitory who I think wanted to go and we were all asked to keep a watch on her because she was supposed to be taken home because she wanted to go elsewhere. So everybody was on guard. My cousin wanted to go. But it was never explained. People were getting the Zimbabwe Review, which was like a newsletter of the Liberation Struggle. It was being circulated in the dormitories and people were showing a lot of interest in reading it. 'It's about the Liberation Struggle, you know. *(Whispered)* The white man must go. We need black government.'

That bit I didn't really care about, but the bit that I cared about was having these terrorists in place, governing, who will take everything from everybody. I really detested

the idea. I had a friend and she was telling me, (*Whispered*) ‘Ah, you see, this holiday I met comrades. They were really nice. They are good people. They were doing this and that’. I said, ‘Ah, but those are terrorists. How can you go?’ She was Esther. I said, ‘Esther, those are terrorists. They can never be good people. They are terrorists. They will take away everything from you - your mother; you’ll not be even your father’s daughter.’ That was how far I had distorted the whole thing. ‘You’ll not be your father’s daughter. You’ll never be your mother’s daughter. You’ll be everyone else’s and they can do what they want. They are not good people.’ And she said, ‘No, they are excellent.’

I could see the teachers were so excited about something that I could not understand. When school opened for the first term of Form III, 1975, the teachers were very excited and the Principal made this grand speech about there being a war in this country. ‘There’s war all over the place, there’s war outside this building, there’s war on this plank that I’m stepping on. So if anybody comes to you and asks you about terrorists, tell them the Principal knows. If anybody comes to you and asks you about Rhodesian soldiers, tell them the Principal knows. You don’t know anything yourselves - it’s only me who knows.’

That very same evening, I think, there was a contact between the Rhodesian soldiers and ZIPRA (they were the ones in the Gwanda area) and a number of soldiers died. There was an aerodrome behind our dormitory and we were told that a helicopter was coming. For us it was the excitement of seeing a plane landing and taking off. The Principal forgot to lock the girls in and so when the helicopter sounds were heard, we all rushed out of our dormitories to the aerodrome. We could all have been killed if they had decided to shoot each other but then the story went that when those boys saw that almost the whole school had run to the grounds, they decided not to shoot. The soldiers didn’t know that there were ZIPRA already deployed around the aerodrome who meant to kill them even more when they were being picked up. In a way we saved these soldiers - they could all have been killed, all of them. But we had rushed to see this plane taking off, this helicopter landing and it was such an excitement for us.

It was the same evening also that these same boys had to take all of us, the whole school, ourselves and our teachers. When they couldn’t kill these soldiers, they just thought to themselves, ‘Okay, we will just take these people to the hall.’ So when it was

supposed to be time for prayers, they took over ringing the bell themselves. The bell was ringing in a very strange way, producing very strange sounds and we said to ourselves, 'Ah, but, how are they ringing the bell today?' but because it was supposed to be prayer time, we took our bibles and our hymn books. As we were trying to get out of the dormitory, we saw this man covered from head to toe in mud. (The soils are red around Manama Mission.) He was wearing this earring, and he was really - I don't know how to describe this mood - in his, in the climax of his [in]sanity. He looked like a crazy man and he was carrying this thing and he had all these things around him. Later we learned that the thing he was carrying was a gun and that the chain of iron, of copper things all over his body, were bullets. A bullet belt and a machine gun! We looked at him and he just went, 'You children of the bourgeoisie! So you are at the boarding school. You want us to fight so that you can come and run this country! You have to fight for yourselves.'

We were asked, all of us, to go outside and we went outside, all of us. The teachers came, everybody came. So it was the whole school and we went to the hospital and they took some nurses there and then they went to the church and they took the clergymen. For them it was such a joke - they said 'Oh well, the priest will pray! And God will be with us!' and all these other things.

It was a sad thing that they <sup>97</sup> punished the principal for money that we took with us. We took all the money that we had paid in for school fees because they said, 'Well, where's your money?' The stupid thing that they did was that when we reached the Tuli River, the person who was carrying the coins was ordered to throw them into the Tuli River as they could only carry paper money. When we had crossed the Tuli River, they gathered us at a point and then they started explaining why they had taken us all, boys and girls plus teachers - everybody, the whole school. (The principal was left because he was instructed to phone the soldiers and tell them that they had taken us. So that he would not be in trouble himself.)

I was so scared, scared to death because when you looked at this person, this supposed 'liberator', he looked like an animal. He didn't look human, you know? You just told yourself, 'This cannot be a human being. This is the worst lunatic I have seen in

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<sup>97</sup> Ambiguous; the freedom fighters or the Rhodesians? I think it was probably the latter as later in the story Talent talks of the Rhodesian forces interrogating children who went back from Botswana

my whole life.’ And they really didn’t care. Their language was raw. ‘You fucking bourgeoisie. Your mothers are busy fucking each other while their children are learning; are we fighting for this country so that you fuck each other between the sheets?’ The language was so wild! ‘You have small penises and you have a little what-what.’ They didn’t sound like human beings.

So we were really, really scared. We were also made to<sup>98</sup> believe that these terrorists could turn into snakes, they could turn into a whirlwind, they could turn into a river, anything. They really were not human beings in our opinion. So we were scared, really, really scared. They would always separate girls from boys when we sat down to rest. They would say ‘Boys, sit over that way and you girls sit over that way.’ We walked from there to a village in Botswana. It was a long walk. I think it was almost two days’ walk in thorny fields, sometimes hiding from the helicopters because the soldiers had followed us and had picked up our trail as we had just crossed the Tuli River. They were like escorting us, just seeing exactly where we were going. They followed us the whole way.

Our uniform was red with a white collar so when the helicopters were following us they instructed the girls who were wearing uniforms to take the uniforms off because they would be spotted. If you happened to have been wearing a white *pant* also, then you had to take it off as well so that you wouldn’t get spotted, something like that. It was very, very difficult for most of us and it was the most traumatic experience any of us had gone through. There was no food, there was no water. Botswana’s very dry. Fortunately there had been rain perhaps the night before, so we got our water from the dew that was on the tree leaves. We would take turns to carefully pluck leaves off a tree and suck the dew as part of water.

*Did you stay in your groups? All the Gwanda people together?*

Oh, it became everybody’s concern. The tribal cliques dissolved themselves. When we were taken then we were like everyone else was caring for everybody. My cousin and I became very close and we still are close. During our walk we found ourselves needing each other more than we ever did because at home there were other people. Now we were just the two of us in the middle of the bush and my cousin was not

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<sup>98</sup> meant to/ made to of previous note.

as physically strong as I was. (I was sporty - a person that they call an outdoor person.) I would hold my cousin and when she couldn't walk fast, we would just slow down even if the other group went and left us behind. I would just give my cousin space. I could not leave her.

I think the girls that had the most serious problems were those that were menstruating already because there was no water. When we got to Botswana, the girls who were menstruating went in separate vehicles and those of us that weren't menstruating, were put with boys (*laughs*). We rode in the same vehicles with boys.

But I jump ahead and must go back to the first village where we got to Botswana. You start off by being angry, being confused, not knowing exactly why these things are happening. When we were approaching Botswana, these Freedom Fighters called something like, 'Look, now we have to leave you here.' Then they called one of the teachers and they told him, 'You are in charge of this group. You have not been taken from school. You are a Youth Group that organised itself from, from this school and you want to join the Liberation Struggle. Okay?' So the teacher said 'It's okay' and we went with these teachers who were now in charge of us as the whole school. We trusted them, but now we were in a different situation and we didn't even know whether to trust or not to trust. But they could not help it. There was no way they could disagree with the suggested notions because we were in the middle of nowhere and we could fall back on nobody. That was the situation; we had to live with it.

So when we were approaching this village, all the women in this village were crying. Really crying like it was a funeral. And these women Pauline! You know the way people cry when a coffin is brought home? That's the way these women were. We were so tired and confused ourselves and we had reached the point where you've no feelings, where you really don't care what is going to happen to you. So when these women saw us, they really started wailing and crying and they were going like, 'How could people do this to these young children? How could people do this to children?' They were crying and we were so hungry and so tired, and feeling hopeless. We didn't have any hope in us. If we had died at that moment, I don't think we could've understood why we even died. You know?



So we just sat there and these women went on crying and crying, I don't know for how long. They were saying 'What are you going to do with these children? How can you take such small children to join a war?' and we were just too tired to follow it all and it ceased to have any meaning for us. We were just watching them. When somebody is crying, you are supposed to reciprocate and cry also. We didn't do that. We just looked at them. They did give us water. For the first time we drank water. And they tried to feed us and then they organised the lorries. And then - listen to this part - because the soldiers really were following us, they decided to put us in prison.

So they told us, 'Now you are going to prison.' (*Laughing*) When we got to the prison they gave each one of us prison gear. There were green gowns for girls. I tell you, I just told myself: 'Perhaps this was the beginning of the end.' And they treated us no differently from prisoners. We were put in these cells with these Botswana prisoners, female prisoners. They would just take us out to work or to eat in the same place. I have never seen such cruel treatment. They just treated us like we had also committed crimes. We were fed samp and most of us got sick. But we were kept in this prison for two or three days.

*How did the rich girls cope with this?*

Oh, it was terrible. It was terrible on them because they could not cope, first of all with the hard walking; some of them got really, really sick and had to be carried on stretcher beds. But for some of them, well, it was an adventure.

*And, tell me, what about your faith? Did you think 'God's gone'?*

You know, I didn't even think of God. I didn't even think of Him. There was too much happening and it was really difficult to fall back and say 'God is here' because everything that was happening was so ungodly. It was so ungodly. Everything was so far away from the way I was raised. The things that were happening were too far away removed from the things I believed. The way these comrades were behaving, the way they were talking. It was - just - another world.

The Rhodesians lost our trail and the United Nations intervened. They were processing the parents' documentation to come and collect their children from Botswana if it were possible. The UN were going to provide the transport to and from Botswana. We were taken to this camp and then - listen to this - people's behavioural tendencies

changed totally. In school there were rules and we were 'protected' by a fence. Here, the girls went wild. In this camp there were cigarettes, there was beer, there was everything. ZAPU was a very rich organisation, very, very rich. So you know these comrades brought cartons of cigarettes and started saying 'Hey girls! Be liberated! Start smoking. Get some cigarettes!'

That's when my religious values started knocking on my brains all over again. I didn't experiment. I said, 'No, I don't smoke. No, I don't drink.' but most of the girls started smoking and drinking there and then. In the name of Liberation they were drinking and smoking. They were going out with these comrades and they would be given money to buy bread. You could see some class differences emerging in this refugee camp. You find a person who is now able to buy bread and you have been through the same journey. Already some are buying bread, some are buying drinks, some are buying fish. And you are relying on the food that is supplied to you by the refugee authorities. You see these girls starting to have a life, already. Although in my opinion it was such a disorganised and dehumanised life. All they did was to sleep with these comrades, get money and then use the money to buy fish and bread. The cigarettes and beer they would get for free. They would go, 'Are you not smoking?' and I would say, 'Ah no. I don't smoke.'

*And how did the boys react?*

The boys really were extreme! They were drinking and smoking! Liberation. Adventures Unlimited, for the first time. It was like, you know, well, 'welcome freedom!' (*laughing*) But some of us felt more imprisoned by that sort of behaviour.

*I would have been terrified.*

It was terrifying for some of us and we were really not sure but then what they started doing was to start some educational programmes. They said 'Well, we did not just take you from school. There is a reason. We as Freedom Fighters, most of us who are carrying guns, have very little education and we look at ourselves in a free Zimbabwe and we are asking ourselves, "How are we going to run this country without any education?". So, because of those reasons, we had to look for people who had already embarked upon an education process. That is why we have taken you. We will need educated people in Free Zimbabwe. We are not going to need these guns when the country is taken. We

will need brains. And you have the potential brains. You might not have finished your education but we will finish it up for you. The Party is going to take over from where you parents left off.'

*They talked about 'The Party' even then?*

Now they used 'The Party'. 'The Party is going to take over from where your parents left off. The Party needs you. In the process we do have partners,' and that's when they started talking about the United Soviet Socialist Republics, the whole of Eastern Europe. They started discussing it with us because we didn't know much. In Geography we learnt just in passing that 'This is USSR' and that 'Germany is divided into two. So is Korea, so is Yemen' and all those things. But it didn't have any meaning to us. But then they started talking about this other side of the world where the people are supposed to be living equally, without racial discrimination and all these other things. 'When you go to school, you will not only go to this other world, you will also go to the Americas.' They really brought good propagandists to talk to us. They would say, 'Girls, those who want to go to Jamaica, you go and register there and those who want to go to this other country, you register here'. So we were made to believe that from this camp, we were going straight to school.

Meanwhile, the United Nations was processing the coming of our parents and my uncle came, for me and my cousin. They realised then that perhaps what they had said had not worked so well and so they decided to use threats. Maybe they realised it might not have been enough to make all these promises and so they decided to also threats. 'Okay. If you decide to go back with your parents, we'll just kill all of you, you and your parents. We'll just blow all these buses up. Who do you think will fight for you? You have to participate in this fight because you are the people who are going to run the country anyway. You stay home, you get your education, you still run that country. You join us in the Struggle, you still going to get an education and you still run the country. But we would rather have you in this Struggle than have you going back. If you go back then we don't have you. We will just kill all of you. You and your parents. It is finished if you go.'

So we had two options. Either stay or go and die. Go and perhaps hope that your education will continue. We were given no more than five minutes with our parents. The

scene was like ... have you been to a dairy when they put all the cows out? All the cows are waiting out there and they release three to four calves? And you see all these calves coming out. That is how our parents were behaving. They would release three or four of us and we would have a whole multitude of parents crowding us, each one of them is trying to find out about their children. It was like that. Two, three children come out and every parent stands up, rushes out to check whether that child is theirs or not. From there, I don't know whether it was some magistrate's court or not, I can't remember it so well and then there would be the Botswana, the Tswana mobile police there and you and your relative. They were simply allowed to ask you one question: 'Do you want to go? Or do you want to stay?' There was no time for discussing anything, you see? But then you close your eyes and say, 'If I go, we all die; if I stay, there's a chance.' So all you could say is 'I will stay'.

*And your cousin stayed too?*

Yes, we stayed. But you should have seen the parents crying. It was the most pathetic thing. It was terrible. It was really, really terrible because there was no time to explain. We were so many and it was all so strategically planned. If we were given too much time to talk about these things, then most of the children would obviously go back but they created an atmosphere that did not allow any discussions. Either you go or you stay.

*How many children went back?*

I think there were about three out of the four hundred and something and those three even joined us when we were in Zambia. They said that when they went back their parents were in more trouble. The soldiers were beating them up again and again and they themselves were being beaten to tell more about the terrorists because they had stayed with terrorists for twenty-one days. They were abused by the system they thought was going to protect them!

So we were left there and the propaganda continued. 'We will take you to school. We have to prepare you to run the country. We Freedom Fighters are not educated, we will need you.' So goes the propaganda and those who had already started smoking were smoking even more, they were drinking even more. But my cousin and I didn't indulge in

that because we morally, we still believed in the same things that we were raised to believe. So we stayed away from alcohol and everything.

So for me, as a woman, to be able to make that decision, when all these other girls had teamed up with boys and drank and smoked to prove that they were equals with the males. I didn't need to drink and smoke to prove that I was an equal. I wanted to prove it in the best way I knew how and that was by remaining true to myself and doing the best that I could under those circumstances. So I never joined in the smoking and drinking squads. I never joined in the manhunt squads like the other women, like even the schoolgirls. Some of the groups would really just look for guys - have sex and in turn get bread or fish or anything. A lot of things happened, not in the open but you would see this girl who was so penniless now with a lot of money. 'How else does a woman access money in a refugee camp?' is the question. How else can she get so much money when the parents didn't leave any money, when we all left the school without money? If you add up, you would definitely come up with an answer. That perhaps she made up some relationship with the mobile police of Botswana.

*What did they say to you for not doing it?*

They didn't pay much attention to that because they were so caught up in this new life that was beginning, they were so involved in this new discovery where there were no rules - literally no rules - and you could do what you wanted. You could drink as long as you remained in the refugee camp and believed in the principles of Liberation, of the sovereignty of our country. Everything that you did mattered very little. And beside that, I was far too small to be noticed anyway! (*laughs*).

There were others who were even younger than me and smaller in size who misbehaved, seriously misbehaved - fourteen-year-olds or thirteen-year-olds, drinking and smoking. When I see a thirteen-year-old now, drunk and smoking, I have this kind of pain that I fail to explain, because I ask myself, 'What is going to happen in the next thirty years in the life of this child?'

So when I look at myself during that time, I tell myself I was a woman who was capable of making a decision. I could not be influenced just because it was a very fragile situation and one could be influenced so easily. We were vulnerable. There was no protection, no moral protection. Except that you couldn't have sex in the open while

others were watching but you could just go behind there with this other comrade and that other thing would just simply happen. So I and my cousin remained ourselves.

After the parents had gone they started processing our transportation from Gaborone, from Francistown, to Lusaka where ZAPU was based. I think one or two girls crossed over to the other camp which was full of Muzorewa's people by then and then they went to Mozambique. About two kids from our school went to Mozambique. The rest of us stayed together because our teachers were with us. I think that helped a lot. It was my first time to fly, so you can imagine the excitement even if one was a refugee. It was really one thing that I'd always dreamt of - flying, in a plane going to foreign lands.

We flew to Zambia and as soon as we got there, there were these Russian trucks to ferry us to the refugee camps. We went into the same trucks, female and male people and we got to this camp in the night. We found a whole congregation of people - fat women - in this refugee camp; some were like monkey-walking, some were snake-walking, some were frog-walking and some were gathered there. Those who were doing this kind of strange walk were being punished for coming late to the parade - 'You, you, you and you, you do the frog walk for so many metres, until you join the others. You do the monkey walk. But when we reached the place, that was how it looked. How does somebody just decide to walk like a monkey? How can somebody do a frog walk? You know it was a real shock.

Some of the girls were saying: 'I know why they brought us here... Every girl will have to service fifteen comrades.' Contemplating us being used as sexual objects was the scariest moment I ever had in the war. Just to imagine myself ... this girl was saying, 'I think we will be having a maximum of fifteen men to service.' Sexually. It was such a shock. I - I was just imagining, how? I was not even dreaming of having sex, I - it was so scary for me. So I felt it was bad to be a woman. At that moment I really felt that I wished I was not a woman.

Others were saying that we will sign contracts. 'It is like we are joining the terrorist army. So we will be signing contracts and we will be paid. The money will go into a banking account and then when the war is over, we will be given this money.' Well, that part is where I said, 'Well that will be okay! That doesn't sound too bad.' It didn't sound as bad as, you know, being a sexual partner to fifteen male comrades, you

know? (*Laughs*) I felt that perhaps I could live with that. But then to go home and kill - that also was yet another story. I didn't know how to handle that one.

But before I had time to think that thought through, they started bashing up this woman. She was bleeding and she was being beaten by two or three of them, who were really like vultures preying on her. They were screaming, 'There's no fucking in this place! You don't get fucked here!' and all the time beating this girl. What exactly did this girl do? I only learned much, much later, that this girl was caught being intimate with her boyfriend. They had crossed Zimbabwe together from Plumtree and they were caught being intimate together and that's what they were suffering for. And that's the reason why everybody was brought together, and that's the reason why all those other people were being punished for coming late. I tell you, it was like the really extreme negative when it came to negativity<sup>99</sup> in the practice of looking after each other in the war. So this was the Liberation Struggle, the so-called heroic struggle? There is a lot of the inside story, of the real story, that is never told. There are a lot of things that happened behind the heroism and all those other things but those stories are never told. They are never told. You, you will only get this glorified picture but actually a lot of terrible things used to happen in the war.

This girl is being battered and when I looked at this, I said 'Why would they beat her? Worse than they beat the guy?' I didn't see them beating this guy, I just saw them beating this girl. So I said, '*Aiwa!*'<sup>100</sup> I did feel good though that fucking is not allowed in this place - that that idea of fifteen was rubbish. But I also didn't think that they needed to prey on her, to tear her into pieces just for that.

Then they asked where our pastor was. 'He must bless this Liberation Struggle. He must pray.' In Zulu or Ndebele they shouted, 'Where is the Pastor? Bring him here! Where is your Bible? How can you lead all these folk without the Bible?' Unfortunately the pastor escaped during our walk somehow. He was mature, he understood these things and he just slipped away and went back to Zimbabwe. But the real reason that they were really looking for this pastor was to mock and make fun of him and he was not there. I was so happy that he was not there because I didn't like the way things were going.

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<sup>99</sup> I know this is not standard English but I kept it as Talent had said it because its indicative of her reaction.

We were just told to go and sleep in some tents on the floor. Oh, it was dirty. The following day they had a lot of uniforms, I think they were Chinese uniforms because it had the kind of rice, green and brown rice, of the Chinese uniform. The following day we were told to change our clothes and each one of us got a pair of those Chinese uniforms and a pair of warm boots. But they were so heavy. They were heavy. All this sort of thing. It felt so hot. The shoes were so heavy we could hardly walk; we really had to apply energy to lift one foot and follow it by another. Those army boots are heavy. And sometimes it was not even the right size. You could be given size five when you were size three and you just had to tie them up and it was really funny. But the excitement in the eyes of these Freedom Fighters seeing us in this uniform - 'Look at these soldiers. Aren't they cute! They look so beautiful. Oh! They are perfect soldiers!' - I did not understand it. I said 'They are so excited!' They said, 'Now we are dressed up for the war! Now we are getting intellectuals to join us - hey!' Something like that.

Then there was this military exercise thing. Even though I was a very athletic person myself, I could not get used to the military-driven exercise. You run up the mountain, frogwalk downwards, or crawl or roll. All these kinds of things. By the time we went for break, I tell you we were all finished. But it was worse for the girls with big bodies. They were bleeding because they were wearing this uniform and they had big thighs and it was squeezing, and they were running so they really suffered. They just said, 'Oh, that's being a soldier. A soldier has to get used to seeing blood' and in the exercise, they did not separate male from female. I thought, 'Ah, so this place has no woman, has no man because when you are wearing these uniforms, they can't tell which one of you is female and which one of you is male. And your hair is not done so it is difficult to tell. But okay. That's fine, no problem.' But then of course we suffered, the muscle strains: we really suffered from those because the exercises were extreme; extremely military for people who were not militant.<sup>101</sup>

The instructors were all Zimbabweans. Instructions were even given in our own languages, in our mother tongues. But what struck me on that first day, on the second day in the camps, was the way the education was organised. They had these military exercises

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<sup>100</sup> Shona for an emphatic 'No'.

<sup>101</sup> Again, Talent's choice of words indicates the stress of it all.



in the morning and then after the military exercises, you go to different classes, for different kinds of lessons. It was not only about being taught how to kill or how to save your life. There were also lessons about how to keep yourselves healthy. Those were conducted by health professionals who had one to three years' training and who were either Russians or Cubans. They would say, 'How does a soldier keep himself healthy? What kind of foods? What kind of exercises?' There were also psychological lessons on how to behave when you were in pain and how to look after each other in general. And then there were also philosophical lessons - what was this war all about?; the origins of these wars; how the world is divided into [different groupings]. For the first time I missed the lessons of Creation, of how the world came into being. In my growing up there was always the One who had the power above all and this time He was not there. So I was saying, 'This will be another world.'

*Talent, I was very struck by Nelson Mandela's reply to the question as to why he hadn't joined the communist party. He said 'There are really some good people but there is no God in their scheme of things.'*

You see? So I had a big question about that but I could not do anything about it. Even if there were pastors there, it was a mockery. They would have been asked to conduct a mock prayer and do all these kinds of things. So, I missed that part really, I must confess, I was missing it all the time. I said my prayers in my heart and when I was going to sleep I would say my prayers quietly.

When they were doing a health lesson, they would say 'If your vagina is bleeding you are a virgin.' The way they would just use these words was out of my understanding. I could not understand why a human being could be so wild in his talk. I said, 'Gosh, these are animals of a special kind. How can God create these people to be this disrespectful of anybody?' 'When you have no cotton wool, what you insert inside your vagina is - blah, blah, blah!-'. He would just go on and on and on and you will be seated there and this one is male and this one is female. I tell you I've never ... (*speechless*). Those were the first days and they were not even in the training camps. These were just refugee camps where people who were supposed to go for military training were waiting. The wildest language I ever heard was in that first camp that I went to.

Then I got sick. I mean, the food, the water and all these things, I really got sick. There was this guy who said 'I don't touch the buttocks of women I don't fuck. Queue up!' (*laughs*) and he was throwing these syringes. 'Next!' And he throws these syringes on our buttocks. He was even a black Zimbabwean, just like us. What I'm saying to you is that, when I look at it as a woman, that is the place where I found the wildest behaviour and the wildest language, the most unrefined, way of behaving and communicating. I found it in this first camp.

I think that thing (*points to a lump from the injection*) lasted on me until '89, or, '90. I don't know how it disappeared. I could feel it all the time and I used to tell my friends, 'You know, I got this thing in the camp.' This Russian-trained doctor who didn't want to touch the buttock of a woman he doesn't fuck. (*laughs*) You know? (*they laugh*) If the reality of the situation in the camps had been shown in Flame, I don't think they would have allowed it to be shown. Worse things happened to the women than they show in that film, but the good thing is that it started people talking about the war and it's the only film that is there for now, about the war.

People really got sick in that camp. We were from a boarding school - smart things - and this was bush life: really, really, wild. We started crying. (*laughs*) Then Joshua Nkomo came and said, 'All those children who came from Manama, I want to see them.' So we went. And we could just not stop crying. So he gave an instruction that we should be removed from that camp. 'Let all the girls be removed from this camp. The girls that came from Manama.' So the lorry was there and we were removed from this, the most horrible place I have ever dwelt in. I don't think I will live in such a terrible place again in my whole life. It was the most traumatising place I have ever habitated.

The new camp was, I think, south-west of Lusaka. I can't remember the directions now but they called it Victory Camp. It was MPLA of Angola's headquarters and we went there. (These other girls who did not also come with us from Manama had a problem in remaining in that camp.) When we got to this new place now, the MPLA headquarters place, there were all these female combatants and they were demanding jewellery - like earrings, wristwatches. You were supposed to surrender it because it might be attached, some kind of communication with the Rhodesia Government. So people surrendered their jewellery, never to recover it again in their whole lives. Well,

with us, from school, we didn't have anything to give. 'Do you have any necklace? Do you have any watch?' 'No comrade No. No I don't have. No, no, no.'

The funniest part now was this thing of having new names. *(Both laugh)* They took all our names and then they come with a whole list of new names. 'You, your name is so-and-so, and you.... - ' The thinking was that if somebody was sent to find you in the war, they would never find anybody of that name. They would even make sure that those who came from Matabeleland got Shona names and those that came from Mashonaland got Ndebele names. So that you would be totally untraceable. You see? Because everybody, more than 200 girls, were given new names, by the time he finishes, nobody even remembers any! *(laughs)*

*What was yours?*

They called me 'Dudu'. Dudu means 'somebody who comforts.' Complete, it was like Dudusila, which means 'the comforter, the one who provides comfort.' It was a really nice name. I got a nice name. But some people got wild names like, 'Prostitute Work Hard' *(they laugh)* 'Prostitute' would be the name, 'Work Hard' would be the surname. Some names like 'Chaos', you know? 'MawilaChaos prostitute' - 'You brought Chaos in.' *(laughing)* You could get any kind of name. So I was happy with my name but I couldn't remember it. *(They laugh)* They go, 'You! You remember your name?' Ah, none of us could remember our names. *(They continue laughing)* And then they said, 'Well, we will beat you up if you don't remember you name! If I call it again, just make sure you remember. If you don't, we will fix you!' They call it again and still some people wouldn't remember. Then they just start beating them. 'You, what is your name, you?' A big *klap* and a kick and then from there, you would never forget it again!

Violence was used to instil intelligence in you in their opinion. If you couldn't be intelligent enough peaceably, then they will apply violence, then you will remember, because you don't want to be hurt. Again I thought, 'Hah, this is no place for people.' Three or four days later about ten of us were chosen to invent new names for others. (When our school was taken, a lot of people started joining the war and all the girls then were brought to this Victory camp.) So I was in the group that was making new names for others. But it would be so difficult because there would be more than 500 people and

you had to take turns to fifty new names. I tried to remember my cousins' names, my aunties' names, everybody I've come across's names until I really ran out. (They could have the same name but not the same surname.) If you couldn't change the name, you needed to change the surname, you see? You could not have two Dudu's, with the same surname. You had to create Dudu So and so, a different surname.

So, I tried. But I think it was after a month, I just went there and I said I had run out of my intelligence for names. (PA laughs) And they said, 'Ah, this one is crazy!' So I was kicked out of the place. I didn't care, I got kicked out and that was okay. They really give you a kick with the military boots. Not the kicking out, the English one, but really physically. Kick out.

*And that would be a woman, would it?*

It would be a woman and you would be punished for very small things. The bad thing was that, in the war, things were not explained. You just got punished and then you would know that such things are not done. If I do them, then I will get punished. There was no room for mutual understanding because there was no space for that. We were in a hurry to get Zimbabwe free and, in their opinion, there was no space [for communication.] This is not 'home'. Some of the imagery they would use would be, 'Where you get a leaf, and you write a letter to your mother and you give it to a mouse, and the mouse will take it to your mother. And you tell your mother you are in the war.' You know. That kind of thing. If you close your eyes and imagine yourself writing a letter on a leaf, getting a baobab leaf or whatever, writing a letter, finding a mouse ... They were making fun of our education. You see? 'So you are so educated, hey? Now that you are in the war, prove it by instructing a mouse to go back home by writing a letter.' Interesting because they keep talking to you on the theme that 'You are the clever ones.' They made fun of that and they said, 'Well, we might as well make sure that by the time you become rulers, you would have at least participated in the liberation of the country that you will rule.' They kept repeating that again and again.

The female comrades were more cruel than the male ones, I think, and I could not understand why. The male comrades were tough but I think, for one reason or another, they were better than the female ones. But I did discover that it's because they were being intimate with some of the girls from school. I didn't see any practice of lesbianism

or homosexuality. But the males that were in the female camps were intimate with the girls who were not trained yet, those who had just come from home. So I think those relationships compromised their attitude towards us. But also more so because we were a group of girls who had an education to some level, as measured against most of the girls we found there. They had very little education, most of them. Perhaps, all of them had been to Primary school only or even Lower Primary for the majority of them. It's a funny thing. I have not had anybody who can explain that kind of attitude and hatred that is founded on education, you know.

The males respected us for our education to start off with. When you look at it now, it wasn't education at all but it was compared to what was there. We could converse, we could read, we could write, we could do a lot of things that these other girls couldn't, not to the measurable level<sup>102</sup> that some of us could. Almost all of those girls had never been to a secondary school. 'The daughters of the bourgeoisie' phrase was continuously used. 'The elite', 'the bourgeoisie', 'the leaders in the future that must fight the war before they leave' - those phrases continued to be used.

When those girls decided to punish us they would really do good things, in their opinion, to make sure that we suffered - kicking us with boots, making us run, crawl on grass that was perhaps one and a half metres tall on a ground that was never trodden upon. There would be bottles, there would be stones, there would be bones and you had to stampede on this ground with your body until it is soft. Whether you got injured, whether anything happened to you, they would not care because it was supposed to be military punishment. So, as a woman I thought, 'Ah, these female comrades, ah, they are too cruel'. And I was telling myself, 'Ha, they are too jealous even.'

*In all this time, your family never heard from you?*

They never heard from me. There was no opportunity to communicate. But I believed in my prayers. I prayed every evening quietly and talked to God and said, 'God, just keep me alive. I don't want to die this far away from home. Please God, keep me alive.' Those were my prayers. 'God, I want to live.'

There was this time when I was one of the few that were elected to lead other girls. I was very young but I was outgoing, I was open, active. And so they picked me. I

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<sup>102</sup> This reads clumsily but 'measurable' is obviously workshop jargon as Talent uses it more than once.

was leading this group of girls and every morning we would take a count to make sure that everybody's around. I had never seen somebody who had never been to school before in my whole life. So I asked these girls to count. Those from the same school with me would count fluently. When it got to these other girls, she would just shout a number. Anything. If somebody counted 'One', if she knows 'a hundred', she would just go, 'A hundred!' And if she knows, 'Seven', she just goes, 'Seven!' One of these girls was a very physically strong girl but she was very nice to me most of the time. She was in the group that I was leading and so I decided to ask her why she shouts a different figure every time, although even if people were counting they would not be standing in the same positions in the mornings, in the afternoon and before knock off. (We were counting three times a day to make sure that everybody was together.)

So I decided to ask her why she would always shout a very odd figure and she was very honest with me. She said, 'My little sister, it's because I don't know how to count.' I asked her why and then she said, 'Because I've never been to school.' And I said, 'There's no school in your area?' and she said, 'No. My parents didn't believe in sending girls to school.' I had heard those stories but I had grown up in an environment where every child of my age was going to school. At this girl's age, she should've had at least two or three years of elementary education. So I said, 'Okay. If you agree, I will help you.'

I did not think of seeking for permission to do that. I just thought of this girl being unable to read and write. There were all these books that were left behind by MPLA and so I took myself a pen and those knee boards and I said, 'Salani, you and I from today, every evening,' (there was electricity in the camp) 'we are going to read. I am going to teach you how to read and write.' So we decided to have our own classes. Salani and myself. And then because Salani knew far too many others who were like her, the first day she came with five. (*laughs*)

I just went and I helped myself to these books and gave them out and said, 'We are going to start off by writing our names because it is important in this camp to write our name. And then we will want also to count up to ten. This week. We must count up to ten between Monday and Wednesday. And then from Wednesday until we reach Sunday, we should be able to reach one hundred.' They were so clever those girls. They

learned very, very fast. By Wednesday, Salani could write her name, she could count up to twenty, thirty. ‘Once you can count up to twenty, then you are going ‘twenty one’ - you are counting again, One, two, three, up to nine and instead of saying ‘Twenty-ten’ you will go ‘Thirty.’

So I made learning easy in figures because I said ‘All you need to remember is one up to ten. And then you say ‘eleven’, which is like two ones and then twelve is like two’s, thirteen - those were difficult - thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. But when they went to twenty I said you can are already counting from one. You go, ‘twenty-one, twenty-two.’ It was really, really nice. I was enjoying myself. But then the numbers grew, you see? (*laughs*) The numbers grew. I had talked to my school friends about this group of girls who can’t read and write. ‘I’m teaching them but they’ve come too many. Let us help each other.’ So I think we were having more than six classes in this one big hall. All of them unauthorised, you see? (*laughs*) All of them unauthorised. Just to help each other.

One day this comrade on duty found lessons in this corner and that corner and he was watching quietly. He was looking at people of his age already writing in these exercise books. We were teachers and we marked their work and we really looked forward to the evening classes. Even more than the day classes because the day classes were full of violence and wild language through and through. At least this was the most human time; the time that we became more human, close to what I was raised to believe. I really enjoyed that. We were all women and as women we decided to educate each other; we felt the need of imparting literacy skills, of passing them on to these other girls who could not read and write. It never occurred to me that it was creativity. It never occurred to me that it was extraordinary thinking. For me, it was like the obvious thing. It was normal to help these people read and write.

It only occurred to me that perhaps it was not very normal when I was summoned to explain. (*laughs*) When I was summoned to explain, that’s when it occurred to me that ‘Okay, I’ve done something quite abnormal here. It was not supposed to be like this.’ They asked me to explain and to say who gave me the authority to take the books. Who authorised me to start setting up illegal classes? I was saved by my age. I was also saved because I came from school. I do not think the same things would have happened if it was someone else who came straight from Rhodesia and started those classes.

I came from Manama Mission. They were very clear about that. They said, 'This Manama girl decided to start another Manama here'. (It still exists now. It's a high school owned by the Lutheran Church.) So it occurred to me that I had done something that was out of the usual when I was being summoned to explain. I didn't feel guilty about it. I said, 'Salani couldn't count and I decided to teach her to read and write and count also and then Salani brought five more people and I couldn't send them away, because I realised they needed it. And then there became more. I thought there were far too many for me and I asked my friends to help.' 'Who gave you the books?' they asked. I just went, 'I took them. I took them.' 'Well, you get one kick, and another kick, and another kick. Who gave you the books?'

They beat me up. You think, 'Ah well...'. Apparently they thought somebody might have used me. I mean sometimes I fail to understand the reasoning behind some of the leadership during the war. Because if they beat you for having started a school, you don't understand. If they also say, 'Who authorised you to?' well, I understood that I should not have taken those books without their authority. Because I started, I just took them and I just used them. I tried to read Portuguese and nobody could help me. I needed to read but all the literature that was there in this camp was Portuguese. I tried to quench my thirst for books, my hunger for books, by just teaching these people. And I really very much enjoyed that.

They decided to get this other person who was in charge of people in the ZAPU camp to talk to me. I explained why I had done what I did. They didn't say I was clever. They didn't say I was stupid. (Well, I had been kicked so many times, I suppose that was supposed to tell me that I was stupid, that I did things that were wrong.) In my heart, I believed so much that I had done something that was so right. Were these people not human in the way I know human beings? They decided to keep us busy which was an indirect way of banning the classes. We were kept busy even up to very late. Lights were switched off by this time of the day to constantly monitor us. So we ended up not doing it in the open but trying to do it in the most hidden way we could.

But then listen to what they did! I think they discussed it in ZAPU and then they came back and they claimed that they were opening a school at Victory Camp for all those people who wanted to [go]. In fact they started selecting people they thought were



young enough to go back to school. One of those who were selected was me and I said I was above all the levels that they were going to offer in this school. But what I thought of then was 'It would have been nice if they had also asked me what I thought about this school.' But it became the grand idea of one of those leaders who came to ask me why I had done it. He presented it as a grand idea he conceived himself and he was credited for it. ZAPU set up the most beautiful refugee school you could ever dream of in that camp. The Nkomo-led liberation movement set up the most beautiful refugee school in Zambia in that place and that's the way it started but they would never acknowledge that bit, you know. So I said to myself, 'Well, so what? What is important is that finally we got formal education in the camp. And for me, I really felt good, because a lot of even younger people started coming in, in the war, and there was a school for them to go to. And I felt good about that. So, I did not feel good just as a woman. I felt, 'Well, I've done something really good!' Even if they beat me and kicked me, I was just thinking, 'Ah, well. Perhaps this is what they call persecution.' You know, that kind of thing? I could cry because there's a lot I'm trying to screen out and only talk about the parts that I feel are related to me as a woman.

The second thing that also happened was that they limited water and there was water rationing in the camp. I was feeling so dirty that I decided to wash without permission and I was found by this other female comrade who was patrolling the whole place. She found me. I had actually finished and was dressing. 'Oh, look at me, you are not so beautiful,' and she spat saliva in my face. I didn't really care but I felt hurt. She told me that I was supposed to be punished for that and she found two more girls who had also washed like me - one of them was a nurse at the same mission school where I came from, the other was coming to the mission school for the first time. So they said, 'Oh! Ah these *fundis*,<sup>103</sup> they are giving us a problem. They've washed.' They took us to this place where the red soil was, put water and said, 'Now we want you to look really beautiful. Will you please smear the mud on your face.' So we applied this mud.

'Cover everything, every part of you. Cover it, cover it, cover it, cover it up.' And then we were made to sit there until we were dry. (When we were dry, it gets stiff and it is so itchy, laughs Talent) Then they blew the whistle and when the whistle was

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<sup>103</sup> slang for 'expert'.

blown, it meant that everybody should come together. So everybody came together and then they said, 'Come in front. You are the most beautiful ladies ZAPU has ever had, the most beautiful, the prettiest ladies in the camp. Come in front.' There we were and everybody was laughing at us. And then we were taken to the kitchen sewerage place – a dark open place and all these foods were there and these worms. You know when they've grown, that they have tails? Then they started to ask us to walk into this sewer. First of all you tell yourself, 'I can't go. I can't do it!' and then you say 'You can do it.' I walked until I was up to my neck in it.

I really felt 'no, this thing is not right. These people are as cruel as Smith was saying back home. There's no humanity in this place.' I really felt that and I looked at the girls and I said, 'It is worse because these are women who are doing this to us.' We were saved when these people who were responsible for running the affairs of the Liberation Movement arrived from Lusaka. They asked them to take us off, because when we got out of that place, we were smelling. Some of the worms went into our bodies. It was really painful, you know? You start crying and then you feel so much pain inside that you can't even cry. I really told myself I was in the wrong place. I shouldn't have been there. I also felt that perhaps women in war are trained to be not-human.

Those senior people told that the camp women that they had done something that was not in the code of conduct of ZAPU, that they could have just killed us, so easily, and for no reason. They were also told that we were a specially protected group because the United Nations wanted to see what ZAPU was going to do with us because they had taken us from school. The talk was still about the fact that we were the first group. 'What if somebody came from UNDP, from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, had come from Lusaka and found us in that state? How would they have presented us to them? How would they have explained that to the UNHCR people? They did not want to be held accountable for that kind of carelessness. We were instructed to go and wash: we washed and we changed our clothes but some of the worms had gone into our bodies. When one of those worms is moving, sometimes there's a trace of, I don't know how to describe it, you have these wounds all over you. Or it just itches and you cannot scratch it because it's inside. It was really, really terrible.

The other thing that happened, from that sewer place was that the following day when I opened my eyes I couldn't see. I couldn't see. Totally, I could not see. I only saw darkness. I told my cousin that I could not see and she said, 'How come?' My eyes were so painful, I could not even open them. So I shut them. Each time I tried to open them, I would even scream. That made my cousin cry. Every morning she had to take me to the toilet, bring me back to the barracks before she went for the military exercises and then when she comes back she would get my porridge and everything. My eyes were swollen and pus was coming out of them - and they had done that thing! One of the doctors came to the camp to inspect the sick people and when he found me with the swollen eyes, with pus even coming out, he got an ambulance for me. I was taken to Lusaka immediately. To the Eye Unit. I don't know, I think I could have lost my sight forever from that thing. It was really painful for me. Then I was just feeling that perhaps if I was not a woman, these women would not have treated me so badly. I was also thinking that perhaps I did not want to be part of that war. Because of that.

When I got to Lusaka, two days later, I could see because they cleaned my eyes. I had the maximum attention. Most of those hospitals where we were going were being run by either Russians, Cubans or doctors from eastern Europe. They really worked on my eyesight. About four days later I could even walk outside. I could see. But I was feeling very unhappy about going back to the refugee camp. I was feeling those places were not meant for human habitation. Later we were informed that most of the people in the leadership of those two camps, the first and the second one, were spies for the Smith government. So they really made our lives very, very difficult. But some of them were just cruel by nature, you know. And I even think that those were stories were created to make us feel good about the way we had been treated.

I was sent back to the camp again. This time they said, 'Well, before you go to school, it is ZAPU's policy that you also undergo military training.' But they don't tell you that you are taking this military training because they want to send you to school, because some of the people will remain as soldiers. I went with a group of girls to this training place that was later bombed, in either '78 or '79, somewhere there. I went. When you go to military training, they are supposed to treat you as a soldier. They are not allowed to abuse you in the way we were abused in the refugee camps, you see? There

are rules that control. There were instructors that had spent so much time under communist discipline training. 'This is how you prepare a soldier to fight a war. If you make your soldier the most unhealthy person, you will lose a war.' A soldier has to be mentally prepared to fight the war, more than physically. So you spent a lot of time dealing with the philosophies of 'Why this war?' and 'What this war is for', besides the military training itself.

I was treated like a human being for the first time. That was the key thing. It was so different from the treatment in the two refugee camps. Though I didn't live for too long in the first camp the treatment remains in me, as if it happened yesterday. And the second one, there was a little bit of humanity but all spoiled by this sewerage thing, you know? In the military training at least you were trained as a human soldier, rather than being abused and being subjected to all forms of abuse. I felt 'Okay'. The instructors were also women. There were few male instructors and a few Zambians, i.e. it was a combination of instructors and they each had specialised in the area that they were training in. They did not just pick Jack and Jill in the street. The theory used to go that ZAPU spends more of its time educating people rather than training them to go and fight. And I think, to an extent, it was true. There was a lot of education that was given to those soldiers before they were sent into the front.

*Do you think that made you better soldiers?*

I think to a measurable extent because their soldiers understood 'Why'. They were soldiers who could explain things. If somebody asked a question they could explain rather than just declaring 'somebody's allowed' but there were also some among those who did not understand anything. Even after that thorough training they remained as wild [as they were] forever. When I mean wild, it was as a human being who is almost like a wild donkey or something like that.

But the education was good, although I still had my reservations about the whole thing. I told myself that I would give this training the benefit of the doubt but what would make it so different from the other two places? It belongs to the same movement. There was a time when I was beginning to think that we needed a Liberation Struggle to free Zimbabwe. But when I was so subjected to so much abuse, like when I lost my sight and

people didn't seem to care, that today I think perhaps it is, and tomorrow I think, 'No, perhaps this is not the only way. There could be better ways.'

It was after three to six months of military training, with all these other theories that go with it, that you would take this ZAPU examination. You write it and they mark it and I came top. I was really good. I was good with the engineering, with the setting of the bombs and the undoing of the bombs. I was so good with the theories of topography, which is like geography. I was so good with the use of the compass. They could not hide anything that I would not find, even if they hid something fifty kilometres away from the place where we were.

My unit would always find the things. I had this girl who was like counting the distance and I was simply holding the compass to keep the direction. They say that when you go as a soldier, you can't carry your food with you; it's far too heavy so your food has to be put in places where you can find it. This is why you have to be able to read the map and to use the compass. Gosh, I was good. I enjoyed that. It was like the Girl Guides, that kind of thing, you know. So I really enjoyed it. Even sleeping in the bush under the tree while we were on this hunt. I really enjoyed that. I enjoyed that. Then I would sometimes feel, 'Hah! This thing can be good after all.'

I enjoyed it, especially if I beat the male-led units! Ah, that I would enjoy. Some of the instructors would say, 'I will take this unit with me' - perhaps there would be a girlfriend there they were interested in - and the other would say, 'I will take this unit here. Ah, let's go!' Myself and about twenty or thirty of us would always find the food, you know? (they laugh) Sometimes it would be really nice things: there would be this tinned chicken from Holland, and milk, and a lot of things. We would get this food and eat - you would go for four days and if you don't get that food, that means you would be starving. Or you would have to improvise by hunting. But when you kill an animal, they are not supposed to see the skin, they are not supposed to see the blood, everything must be really, really buried. We enjoyed it 'cos my unit won; then everybody ended up wanting to come with me.

The other thing that I also enjoyed doing as a woman in this training place was listening to the news. First of all, we were listening to the news as a group. I was chosen

as one of those who should be listening for the news. BBC, CNN,<sup>104</sup> there was Radio Luxembourg, there was South Africa, I mean, we listened to more than twelve stations. We knew where to find almost every station that broadcasted news in English around the world. We captured the main items to do with the Liberation Struggles of people of different places and the people that were supporting these Liberation Movements and what the dictators were doing to stay in power and what the other countries were doing to assist by means of imposing sanctions, banning them from participating in the Olympics and all these things. It was really, really nice. I enjoyed it. I said, 'Ja, this I am happy to do.' We used to sit under a tree and then we listened to the news and then we would say, 'What did you hear?' and we would discuss it. So that when you go to present the news to different groups we were speaking with one voice. We would listen to the news together and then share and then people would go. After some time, I was one of only two people who were allowed to keep the radios in my tent. So I would listen to the news throughout twenty-four hours and I would capture the main items and then put them on a notice board. You start with news of home. What has happened back home? How is the war going? What is the support like? What is the mass understanding level? What is Rhodesia thinking? And then you move on, you go to South Africa. You move on, you go to Namibia,<sup>105</sup> and Mozambique, Angola and then you talk about the support from Africa, also from North Africa, Egypt, Somalia, Algeria and Libya and Nigeria - the key countries that were supporting the Liberation Struggles of southern Africa. (Libya now? Now when I think about it there is some hidden agenda and they are interested in some kind of 'One good turn deserves another', if I may use that [expression].) So, that I enjoyed because then I was given a radio that I could take to any place. I could choose where I wanted to listen to it.

*Was there any station that you trusted more than another? Or did they all have something?*

If I tell you now that we trusted the BBC (*laugh*), looking at what the Zimbabwean situation is like between England and Zimbabwe, you would not believe me, but we trusted the BBC. I trusted the BBC. I didn't trust Washington. It's so funny. I

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<sup>104</sup> Voice of America - CNN came later.

<sup>105</sup> South West Africa – Namibia came later.

trusted the BBC. The more you listen to the news, the more analytical you become but you also become aware of the situation in general. It was like an education process for me and it actually assisted me in trying to understand the reason for being taken away from school. I was responsible for analysing these things and communicating them with all these thousands of girls who were in the camp.

*And were you now a lieutenant or anything like that? Or were you still just Dudu?*

Ah, I don't know. I was Dudu but I was in charge of a battalion. So I don't know what you would call that. I don't know whether it is a lieutenant or what. I was Dudu in charge of the education of all of these girls in the camp, which is like commanding the camp in that way. Yeah, so it was really, really nice. And I was enjoying myself. And then came the time for me to go to school because I had to go.

*And what year was that?*

It was September '77. (I didn't stay in the camps for too long.) We were taken to Lusaka and put through an orientation programme. 'You have gone through the processes that you are supposed to go through in the Liberation Struggle and now we are going to send you to this country. This country's people are people of this origin and the main reason why you are going to this place is because....' They explained it all to you. They sent me to Eastern Europe, to the eastern part of Germany and I was there to learn how to make people live. 'To fight for people's lives and live better' which they call 'sociology' (*light laugh*). Perhaps I was only fifteen even, because I remember my first birthday celebration in Germany was when I turned sixteen. So, well, you go through a lot of orientation. And then you begin to see these people who are perhaps serious about the Liberation Struggle. And sober. Not drunk. And not wild. Sober and composed people. People who will sit down and talk to you about the, the true life. You go through that military training because it was necessary. Not all of us were able to do this. Very few of us. Very, very few. The girls that remained became soldiers. Some of them even died when they were bombed. I even left my cousin in the refugee camp to go to school. She was not outgoing and she was very reserved and she still is.

*Do you ever talk with her about those days?*

We are very close. She's my best friend, even now. We talk about those things. That's the problem with the men – they don't talk through those things and that's why they end up going to the farms and beating people who didn't abuse them. You see, if there are any ex-combatants that are involved in abusing people,<sup>106</sup> if you trace back their history, they might have been abused themselves by others. They got no therapy, nothing, nothing.

Back to Germany. What I enjoyed before I went to Germany was that I met real people, the people that I had looked forward to seeing. These were people who were really sober, people who sat down with you and asked you, 'Where do you come from?' This war is full of extremes - you find extreme abuse in this war, you also find the extreme revolutionary who just thinks it's about killing. But this war is about preparing ourselves to be true Zimbabweans. To be who we are meant to be. People started reasoning with me in the old way and I said, 'I wished I had met these people the first time I stepped in Zambia, then life would have been made easy.' But then such good people are very few.

There were those were people who would give you orientation so that by the time you go to school, at least they would have played their part in a positive way. You do wonder, 'Is he not just trying to lure me into coming back into an even worse situation?' But I also told myself, I would not go to England or any other place and leave my cousin in Zambia. I told myself, 'I have to come back for my cousin.' When I was about to go, we spent some time together at the refugee camp where I was undergoing medical-checkups. We were asked 'Amongst you people that are going, how many of you have missed their monthlies?' When I said I hadn't even started, they said, 'You should already have given birth!' They were really good people in many, many ways. The priority was to check our health status, so we went through a lot of medical check-ups. The first three months were just dedicated to making sure that we were healthy people and we got the special medical attention that each of us needed - that's when some of the maggots were pulled out of my skin and also my eyes were attended to again.

Amongst the Eastern European countries, Germany was, economically, the best of them all. Russia might have been strong militarily and otherwise, but with its economy,

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<sup>106</sup> Acts of thuggery in the on-going social upheaval post-2001 Presidential Election.



Germany was very, very strong. Because it was under the Communist Party, priority was given to the philosophy itself of historical materialism. You spent like one year just doing that – trying, trying to make you understand what it was all about. But what I remember struck me most was that I saw women in supposedly male positions, male decision-making positions even in jobs. In the working places I saw women, female managers – a lot of female lecturers, a lot of female doctors. I saw women in the steel industry, in charge and they were saying, ‘Look, this is a new world where every human being can maximise your potentialities.’ That was the place where I realised, as a woman, you really could do a lot although there were not many of them in the *polit bureau* of the Communist Party. When you looked at the positions that were occupied at the district, provincial level, decision-making positions, not even within the Communist Party itself but within the structures that were operating, I saw women in charge and I enjoyed that.

For me it cleared up the mystery of ‘Is it a mistake of creation for one to be made a woman? Is it a curse of creation? Are you cursed to be female?’ We felt very proud, you know, every time we visited this industry or that co-operative and we were received by women, women explaining things and showing how things worked and we commented amongst ourselves, ‘Hey! This woman, look at this woman! This is a woman in charge!’ It was really good.

During the semesters we never really had any relaxation; we went to work in different economic institutions because they were trying to make us understand how the whole system functions. For example, the first year we went to work on an apple co-operative; the second year we worked with the lettuce and legumes co-operative and then the final year we worked with the auto-electric industry.

*You must have liked that!*

Yes, that was very, very nice. Some of the people who went to school had never done a lot of physical work on the fields – they may have been the children of decision-makers within the Party and were raised in the considerably rich, black areas of the urban community. You would see these girls really crying, refusing to pick potatoes or finding it very abusive to be woken up in the morning at three o’clock to catch a train so that they connect until you get to the place of work.

*But it didn’t worry you?*

It was like an experience that I wanted to do, to learn more from. And it was better than the camps for me anyway. It was a million times better than the camps. It could not be measured. I wanted to learn as much as I could and I wanted to make use of every opportunity that I got. It was the first time that I really understood the purpose of the Liberation Struggle because at this college we were mixed in with so many people. There were people from all the Liberation Movements by then. There were people from the Communist countries, the Socialist countries and it was a whole mixture of people. Most of the learning was done through earphones because they believed that every language had the same value. Those of us who were under the Communist Party were taught to respect our own languages because they are a means of communication. As long as it communicates, that was important. They did not try to make us learn Deutsch. So you would just sit down and you switch on the channel that you wanted to listen to - French, English, Arabic. They would have a whole range of translators in, in the lecture hall.

*Gosh. How many people in the lectures?*

There were so many; 200, 250, depending on the subject. But for philosophy, the hall would be filled to capacity because every student, whether you were going to be a medical student or an engineer, you first of all had to go through that Historical Materialism.

I was talking about women in big positions and that I was inspired to feel good about being a woman and also to continue to think creatively about what we would do when we got back home. Every time we went on a semester work placement, we were also given an assignment to make an analysis and the analysis was supposed to be adapted to your environment and you would have to do a presentation and say, 'On this, if I were to go back to Zimbabwe, or even if I were to go back to the camps, it would start like this and it should carry on like this - '

*Interesting - really good!*

It was really, really good. It is most unfortunate because some of those good things about the communist countries are not highlighted and are not given enough credit. There were really good things that went on there. Perhaps the Party was too strong on people but I do believe when I look at what is there now, that they could have dealt with

the state-ism and removed it in a better way than what they have now. I don't think they are enjoying anything of what is in Eastern Europe now. There's nothing there.

*So, in other words, socialism or communism could have evolved and not been eradicated – Yes. Because there was lots of good?*

There was lots of good - the kindergarten schemes, even the education schemes. They needed a million people to take jobs. Everybody had a house. They were not luxurious but everybody was under a roof and for me that was very, very important. People were not allowed to own property but materially, people want to own things, they want to own a piece of land. They want to feel, 'This is mine,' and that was missing there. The Union of the Social Democrats, the Communist Party and the Christian Democrats, they were like three parties that were ruling East Germany. But people made it appear as if it was the Communist Party only. Perhaps it had the largest influence of them all, but there were three parties that were ruling East Germany.

People were not banned from worship because the Christian Democrats were part of the ruling group. I wish I had gone there now when I am so much more mature because I could have looked at things from a very clear angle. I was just a teenager then, very excited to be abroad and to be part of the lessons, also about the roles of people in society - not separating males from females, giving every individual a chance to maximise their ability and having people only aim according to their ability and only reap according to what they sow.

When we were dealing with philosophy, they would say, 'Well, in Materialism there's nothing like God.' Even though we had problems with this, at least we could debate that. They would show you the way they understood creation, that it evolved like that. You would also say the way you understood creation, and it was one of the most exciting lessons. We discussed it thoroughly and we agreed that it should be a question of the heart whether one decides to be materialistic, or one decides to be spiritual about creation. But at the end of the day when you do your assignment you present it in their opinion – (*laughs*).

*Were you still above average even when there were lots of people?*

Yes, I was working with the comrades – that's how I met my husband - the comrades that were detained in hospital for one year. I passed on the lectures to them and

it was really nice. We were far too many but I was amongst the really best people. I still was amongst the most odd people in my behaviour because I did not want to go to the night things. I didn't want to go to the movies, I didn't want to go to the discos that everybody was mad and crazy about. 'Come Friday we are going out to dance the whole hour, our bones, I will break them, leave them on the floors, come back without some of them!' (*laughs*) I would always stay behind and I also started communicating with my family because I had a cousin in Australia and I had a cousin in England. My cousin lawyer in England was able to tell the people at home that we were okay, we were in good health but that we were separated, the one remained in Zambia and I was in Germany.

And then we finished schooling and we went back. We came back home.

*The war was over?*

The war was over. We watched all the bombings and everything else that took place on the televisions; even the elections. We analysed them and the Communists knew that Mugabe was going to win because he was the most unorganised one. They told us the British would like this one because he's very unorganised and it will take a long time before he sorts himself out. The British wanted to manipulate the process; they also told us he was very immature in his behaviour because he grabbed all his positions - to be a president. His history was that of just being a chancer and they told us about the rigging processes, what was going to happen.

We analysed all of that and they clearly told us that ZAPU was structured like a government already in exile because there was a lot of education and training and structures in place. That was not very pleasing for the colonisers because it would pose a threat and it would probably introduce a true revolution. The British would rather do with the fake one, because they were not organised, they did not have clear structures, they had nothing at home in the villages, they had no structures. The structures that existed in the villages were ZAPU structures: ZANU did not have village structures, even though they were in the majority in population of people in exile (because it was easier to cross to Mozambique than to Zambia.)

We made all those analyses. We were very clear about who was going to win and then they said it is very unlikely that Joshua Nkomo would launch a war if he lost the

election, whereas Mugabe would because he could not stand anybody else in power. We also knew very well that Muzorewa was going to lose because even if he had access to state machinery, the fact that he put his posters all over the place, it was a clear sign that he was not going to win. (Just as, when I was looking at Mugabe in last year's elections, I was so sure that MDC was going to win the elections in all the urban areas because that's where ZANU intensified their campaign, that's where you saw Mugabe's face all over. I said, 'I know these things, this guy's not going to win. He might win in the rural areas where he has terrorised people, where people are afraid.)

*So you come back home where your party had lost.*

AND where people were very excited about their victories. You sort of feel really lost, a misfit. I did not see myself in any position that would be meaningful under those circumstances. Those people were very excited about ZANU and also there were so many killings in Matabeleland and it didn't feel good to have been ZIPRA. It was really a very terrible time, second to my experiences in the camps.

Can I ask you something? If ZAPU had taken over the country, it would have been much better? I think so, in many, many ways. I think people are looking at that now and they are saying it would have been very organised but there would have been civil war from ZANU. That would have been the problem. The country was really going to be torn apart because I don't think ZANU was prepared to lose the elections. A better situation would have been to equate the cities with the situations in parliament. The British could have designed a system whereby it is 50 and 52 seats which is like the situation now with the MDC. But what they designed was a total victory for ZANU. And I also believe that Muzorewa did not actually get three seats. He should have gotten a little bit more than that, but that's the way they wanted things to be and I'm sure they've regretted that many, many times now. Most of the polling boxes from the north of the country where ZAPU was in control got lost. How can a helicopter miss polling boxes?

We could not go to Matabeleland and most of the Party leaders were already in exile because of the arms caches; my husband was then also being harassed. What we did then was to try and organise people together and list a farm (south of Harare on a commercial farm) as a co-operative and we tried to run that as a co-operative. And then I

started an education programme on the co-op because most of those people had been to school.

*You and your education!*

*(Laughs)* My husband and myself designed an education programme and we started working; my husband was organising the agronomy side and it was one of the best farms around. Everything that people did there was from the money they earned from the pensions that were given out in the early years of independence for Freedom Fighters. Their pensions they invested in this land and they started cultivating but of course they got loans from the banks and then the interest was so high, so despite the very high productivity, all the money went to pay back the interest. As a woman I was really feeling good because I was in charge of this education process and then there were a lot of these co-ops set up by ZANU in the name of Socialism. They formed a Union of Co-operatives. My husband worked to fund a Union of Co-operatives and they were all put together but because he was from ZIPRA, they kicked him out very fast.

I continued to work with the education on the co-operative movement, on the co-operative movement as a whole: we were designing curricula and how they should work. CUSO, Canada decided to give me some time to study in Montreal, to have a look at co-operative theory and popular education and so I went there with my son, my smallest boy. I spent some time there looking at Co-operative Theory and popular education. It was really good. I enjoyed myself. Almost ten months.

I got myself a diploma and came back home and then I started thinking really creatively. When I was working in the Co-operative Movement, there was, what do you call it, 'The Struggle from Within' i.e. when you are doing something that is professional but physical. People sometimes did not understand and they would say, 'Go to the fields, do your cultivation and then after that, plan our lessons, come and teach us,' and then I would say, 'But when do I have time to be with my children?' I ended up with no time for my children.

So I started looking around and answered this advert with the Zimbabwe Foundation of Education with Production. They wanted somebody to work on the social component of a scheme which was being launched. I was selected for the interview but when I went there I saw these people with Masters degrees, with doctorates. I said, 'Ah,

I'm not experienced, I only have a diploma and a degree. These things are not going to work!' But, to my surprise, I got the job. I was simply told, 'The idea is to design a system that improves people's lives in this programme.'

John Con (Conradie) said, 'Well, if I throw you into a swimming pool that is deep, either you sink so deep and you die, or you swim and you come across the decisions.' So I designed a programme on my own. I designed a programme for Women's education, I designed a programme for Health education, I designed a programme for Adult education; they were all three-to five-year programmes. I even broke the one-year programmes down into weekly plans and strategies. John had only to put the figures to them; they were so excited they released the funds!

We started running the programme and it was really, really good. It was a three-to five-year programme and I was also helping with co-op member education with the Zimbabwe Project at Kushinga Pেকেলে. I also met Comrade Freedom and we discussed the need to do small enterprise development for urban and rural people and we launched an organisation together. But I wasn't feeling like I was maximising my creativity. Then I met Cathy<sup>107</sup> and these other people and Cathy invited us to work with her in the Ministry of Education. I went for these interviews all over again and got the job and it was a whole new thing but I was really equipped and armed with the experience of three years working with John Conradie.

John was really, really good. He left me to grow, to think for myself, and that was really good for me because I could think it over at night, write it down, go the following day, try to reshape the idea, try to implement it and then see how it worked. It was really exciting for me to see my thinking translating into people's lives and changing people's livelihoods and people's behaviours. I was really, very, very happy with that. So when I started with Comrade Freedom, I was wanting to expand that.

*What was John Conradie's background?*

He was an historian. He was in the war. He was a lecturer at the university and they used to assist in getting weapons from Zambia, giving them to freedom fighters with his friends. According to the Rhodesian government he was a terrorist and he was

imprisoned for nineteen years. Independence came while he was in prison, so he benefited from that, but he was not happy with the system the way it was working so he simply decided to go on with what he believed in. I was like his right-hand person, so we worked on this thing. The Ministry was trying to design a programme for rural development, for the training of rural development extension workers at village level. They asked Cathy to go around the country, look at what there was and design appropriate programmes and manuals that could be used for training. I joined them a year later in 1988. (They'd started in 1986.) The job was to look at the way people were living, analysing that and, together with these people, designing programmes that would be used to improve their lives. It was within Community Development. It was an education programme all over again. So you can see, I was in social education through and through and I don't know if I'm going to grow out of that at all. (*laughs*)

By this time, 1988, ZAPU was a marginal issue. People did not know even that I could speak Ndebele or Shona because I was wearing a lot of African clothing. I always covered my head and I wrapped something around me. I was very simple, always in tennis shoes and everybody spoke to me in English at the Ministry because they assumed that I was either a West or East African. For three years they did that and then somebody found me speaking Ndebele to somebody else and they said, 'So who are you?' I said, 'Oh, I'm a Zimbabwean.' That was very interesting.

*And you did that on purpose?*

Although I was an outgoing person, I valued my privacy. I preferred to remain myself and when I did not know people, I kept myself to myself and only did my job and because I was doing my job so well, the Ministry promoted me. I always wanted to see results and I made sure that the area I was given I would do. I would learn as much as I could in as short a period as possible. I did anything that was supposed to be done, from picking up the papers on the floor to wiping the tables as long as it was necessary. I think that helped me to grow because I did not see myself as an important person. I looked at myself and I said, 'What is to be done? What is needed to be done?' And I did it and that helped me to grow even faster.

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<sup>107</sup> Cathy Bond-Stewart, co-founder of Africa Community Publishing for Development (ACPD) with Talent, Lucia Manyuchi and the late Chris Hodzi. Africa Book Development Trust (ABDT) is a sister



When Lucia<sup>108</sup> came in the project grew. I was in charge of fund-raising for the project and I was doing it for the Ministry. Our funders were mostly the Scandinavian countries and I sat in on round-table discussions with the Ministry of Finance and the funders. I was always presenting our case and defending the project. I really was feeling good about it. I felt stretched and there was a lot of intense struggle. I can tell you I did not even know how to facilitate a workshop! I would sit down and take notes when discussions were going on and produce reports at the end of the day but because I was willing to learn everything, that made me learn, very, very fast.

*Now, you're so busy with all this, what about your husband and children?*

My husband and children were still on the farm. When I was working with Jon Con, my husband didn't want me to leave the farm but I felt I wasn't growing, I was being thwarted, I felt I could not breathe, I could not grow. I was really suffocating my energies.<sup>109</sup> I explained things to him and the other team. I said, 'Look I'm not growing. I feel I've reached some kind of block. I need to go out of this and I need to grow. I feel I can do more.' Having decided to disagree with my husband, I went on and worked with John.

It was when I was in the Ministry and we were travelling around that I first met Doris Lessing and we went around Zimbabwe together.<sup>110</sup> She was linked to us by Judith Todd,<sup>111</sup> who was a very close friend of my husband's. It was very good. We were looking at community publishing and its growth but that's when I also realised the hunger and shortage of books in schools. There was nothing there. I told you the story (didn't I?) of when we went to this secondary school and a child in Form III could not use a dictionary; my son who was in Grade IV could already use one. There was one atlas for the whole school. I started thinking around that and I said, 'These things can change' and 'Perhaps we can get a few books to a few people, not just school people only, but people in the villages.' I started discussing that.

On my way back from one of the trips to the United States, I passed through Doris's place and I was telling her about these things and I said, 'Doris, you see, I was

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organisation.

<sup>108</sup> Manyuchi – see previous note.

<sup>109</sup> This colloquial phrase is evocative of women's situation.

<sup>110</sup> See The Book Team section in African Laughter, Harper Collins, 1992 (351-370).

just thinking that, we get a newspaper six months late in the village and everybody wants to read it and it's such an old thing. There is so much hunger for books in the villages.' 'Do people really read in the villages?' she asked and I said, 'Yes, people love books,' and then we started discussing it all and decided to give it a try. The first thing that Doris did was to put money into my personal account and I would buy the books and take them to schools. When we started approaching other people they said, 'No, we don't put money into individual accounts. It has to be a separate entity. You have to shape it, organise it, make it an organisation.' Then I started working on that, you know? I took the ACPD constitution, I adapted it, and I said, 'Well, we'll call the organisation 'Africa Books.' I approached people to be Board members and they accepted and I organised the first Board meeting. That was in 1996.

People really were very supportive at the first meeting. There was a guy from the British Council, there was Anthony Chennels<sup>112</sup>, there was Albert (Nyathi),<sup>113</sup> there was Doris herself. We held it at the Jameson Hotel and it was really nice. Even though I got the kind of support I did get, I did not realise the importance of this whole thing. You know, when you do these things sometimes, you don't even think? You are just acting out your ideas and your beliefs. Then you realise you have started something quite exceptional. I started reshaping it, visiting schools and discussing with people. I organised the first workshop, had people around and we sent out the first books. I could not believe the kind of letters we got. The amount of requests! I mean, in the first year we had more than one thousand requests. We went to the commercial farms because I was looking at areas where nobody really cares: I told myself that when a child is born without resources, unless somebody gives resources to mentally capacitate them,<sup>114</sup> this child grows and becomes a slave to other people, even if they are intelligent. I had worked with John on the commercial farms and I knew what the situation was like on the commercial farms. I also looked at the remote rural areas, very remote places.

You find this kind of thinking: 'Ah, when you go to the villages, and put books there, who will read them? It is OK for a child in the village to share a textbook with

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<sup>111</sup> Activist and daughter of the liberal former Prime Minister of Rhodesia, the late Sir Garfield Todd.

<sup>112</sup> Professor of English Literature, University of Zimbabwe.

<sup>113</sup> Author.

<sup>114</sup> Again, although this is awkward English I left it because it is so expressive.

twenty other children, just because its a village school. That's not OK for St George's or in an urban school.' I was asking myself, 'But why?' These are human beings who are supposed to have the same rights as other human beings. And when I looked at how these children even come up with four points at Grade VII - they score 1, 1, 1, 1 under those circumstances. And I was asking myself 'If this child had the same resources as others, how well would this child do?'

I also saw a lot of fear amongst the ruling class or the elite or the people that are in charge because I thought I saw a system of grooming generations of slaves, even if people don't want to pronounce it that way. You can see that people are really enslaved by those of their own. I saw class divisions that were very, very clear to me. There's a class that is groomed to be the ruling class through and through, and then there is this class that's supposed to be the subjects of the ruling class. And I said, 'Well, if I can, I want to work on this process and make sure that these subjects of the ruling class can also grow out of being subjects and be themselves.' That whole concept has worked so well with ACPD and ABDT.

*Why did you leave the Ministry and decide to go, all of you?*

It's something that we really discussed. When we were working on all the books that we designed and worked on in the Ministry, they were books that were not designed around the table or with the intelligence of one individual but books that came out of people's desires for change; they were books that came out of people's expressions and need for change; they were designed and written by the people themselves and what we did was to edit and put it together with Cathy's expertise in editing. You see? So it was not of our own making. The book that created a lot of controversy was *Elections & Leadership, Choosing the Future*, which was part of a democracy series. People spoke out - 'We don't know our member of parliament.' 'We don't know the role of some of our leaders.' 'They are greedy, they steal, they do a lot of things.' Our style was to leave the people's voices within the books and that was not very amusing to the rulers of the times. We managed to win the support of some of the people who were in charge of the law, like Minister Dabengwa, who really loved the book and who defended it through and through with the Politbureau and the Central Committee. He even insisted that all the Central Committee members read that book so that then they could discuss whether what

people were saying was true. If it were true, would they be happy if they didn't know what people thought? Are they better off knowing what people think? They could then do something about it. [But Minister Dabengwa's voice was a lone voice.]

The Ministry sent us a letter instructing us to 'stop activities around this book forthwith,' from the Ministry. We discussed it and agreed that we wanted this project to continue. You know when you believe in something, you just go on? The four of us resigned from the Ministry. We discussed it and agreed that we had to go but the funny part of it is that we did not have jobs, (*laughs*) and we did not have money. But we had our convictions and our dreams. So we thrived on those, the convictions and the dreams! (*laughs*) That's how we set up ACPD and it was set up with Z\$ 2000 and somehow things worked themselves out. We got jobs, consultancy jobs, and we used the money to sustain ACPD and the organisation.

Talent, we're nearly at the end so can I ask how it feels to be a woman now? And I wanted to talk a little bit about your children and the importance for you of empowering them, as you say? And how you feel as a woman on her own.

My husband and I separated in 1997. I think the process of working is difficult. Families want you to remain together for better or for worse as you know, when you make your oath. But you also need to be yourself, you need to maintain your integrity. When you talk about it with your families, their first reaction is that perhaps you have found somebody else. They don't believe you when you tell them, 'No, I don't have anybody else. I told my husband I needed some fresh air, I needed to be alone, I needed to feel "Who am I?" I needed to discover more about myself.' I was not feeling good about the relationship because it was a one-way thing. His reaction was, 'How can that be? No, we were meant to be together. We were created to be together. You cannot do that.' He could not believe it also.

As you grow in discovering about yourself, you can feel that something is unbalanced. My husband was a person who was looking at the outside world more than his own family. He would care and worry more about what was happening in the co-operative movement than anything else and had very little time for the family. And that I was missing. I said, 'If you cannot have time to be with us and if you cannot have time to

get resources to come to us, and you get resources for everyone else, except yourself, then you cannot be a family person because a family person's priority is their family. If you can't do that, I don't see why we should be a family. I would rather be by myself, then I know that I have the children and I have to do this by myself.' Those kinds of people [activists who put the Movement first] create a lot of pressure on you, a lot of stress: you get really, really stressed.

The rural area was important to you in the beginning: you didn't feel so at home in Bulawayo. Do you like the children to go back often to the rural areas, like now when you're going to Gweru for New Year? Or is it OK that they've grown up in the town?

I don't want them to lose touch with the realities of life. I want them to know that life is so different and I'm so happy that I raised them that way. I used to show them a lot of movies about slavery and we would discuss that. We showed movies on slavery, we watched movies on Jesus of Nazareth, and I used the *Bible* so much. I used the Old Testament to raise my children. We studied the Old Testament from Genesis to the last Prophet.

*And you didn't make any difference between your male and female children?*

No, no. We had lessons every day so I would say to them every evening 'Unless somebody can tell me where we ended yesterday, we are not going to have a story.' The story of the Israelites is very exciting, for kids and they would always say, 'They were in the Sinai desert' or, 'Oh, water had turned to blood!' or 'Moses was by this burning bush.' Then we would read. I would read Bible stories to my children before they went to school. That has been my pattern. Even now, it's still our pattern because we analyse everything. Even to date. I showed films like *Roots*, *The Mandingo Warrior*, and all these north/south wars. When they were young, my son, my smallest boy, used to cry, especially when we showed *Jesus of Nazareth*. He would say 'But he has been so good. How can people do that?' He would always cry and we would explain these things. I think that gave them a very good moral background but I would always take them to the villages. Once in a year we would go and spend four or five days with my grandmother or with my husband's grandmother. We would do that because it was important. We wanted them to see life and we wanted them to see the differences.

Because I was travelling so much, I also wanted them to understand why I would spend so much time going around Zimbabwe instead of being around with them. I designed a system of writing a letter for each of the children every day when I was away. I would talk to them in the same way that I would when I came back from work. I would say, ‘Ah hello, Anthony, how was your day? Did you bring your shoes from the pre-school?’ ‘Ah, Andrew, did you polish your shoes? Where are your socks? Did you have any homework? Have you done it?’ ‘Which story in the Bible are we having today Angela?’ You know, it was like I was there. If I was going away for a week, I would save five days times three, fifteen letters, with a biscuit or a piece of chocolate in each letter or a piece of dried fruit. They would read the letters and eat the fruit. So it was really nice.

My daughter then was asking questions, discussing roles such as washing dishes. My sons would say ‘Ah, that’s a female job!’ and I said, ‘No, you are all my children. You have to learn to cook for yourself. You have to.’ Because of that my daughter refused to wash dishes all the time. When she was small, she was rebellious about it. (*laughs*) When she cooks, even now she says, ‘Well, if I cook, it is on condition that you wash dishes,’ and if they said, ‘Cook this’, then she would say ‘No, if I cook, I cook my favourites. You will all have to make do with the things I like eating. If you want to eat what you like, you will have to cook! So that I also eat what you like!’ Then they all started getting interested in the kitchen because each one of them had something favourite that they wanted to eat. So they all can cook. They all can do dishes and when I’m away they can bake, they can do anything – all the boys can bake. My boys are excellent cooks, especially my firstborn, he’s an excellent cook: he’s really, really good.

How do they feel about Zimbabwe? They don’t feel divided? That they are not ZANU?

My children know that Matabele people are not wholly accepted by the ruling party because we discuss these things. Matabeles are sort of tolerated; they are very aware of that, more so because when my teenage boys were in Solusi,<sup>115</sup> a lot of teenage

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<sup>115</sup> A Seventh-day Adventist School 40 km outside Bulawayo in Matabeleland. The Shona are the bigger tribe and are President Mugabe’s power base. *Mukiwa* by Peter Godwin documents the genocide of the

school leavers were being collected to go to the Congolese war. They were forced. People from Mashonaland did not have the same situation. They were analysing these things and saying 'Well, these tribalistic things must go.' My daughter was a rebel at school. She started a newsletter and the school was against it. She fought back, saying 'You don't want a newsletter because it will tell how you treat us in this school.' There was some kind of abusiveness in the dormitories, Shona versus Ndebele. She just fought that through and through. She went to the Matron and screamed at her and told her they could not continue to make children fight each other. If kids killed each other in the dormitories, what would they do, what would they have to say? They punished her. They made her dig and then when she was digging, the headmaster came and he said, 'Angela you see you're the first girl to be punished' and she said, 'Oh no, I'm not the first one but I know how to deal with this school. I'm going to be a lawyer and when I come back, when I graduate, my first duty as a lawyer is to set things straight at Solusi.' (*both of us laugh*)

They wanted to expel her. She wrote a very long letter to protest. 'You cannot expel me on the grounds of what I said. Girls are abused. This is the reality in this school.' She was being abused by the other girls. She also said, 'Some of you teachers also need to assess your performance. If you have a ten percent pass rate in your subject, surely something is very wrong. It's not like we students are very dull.' When they showed me the letter, I didn't know what to do! She said, 'Some of you score less than ten percent pass rate in your subject and you still call yourself teachers.' But teachers don't like that. Teachers don't like that and when they were trying to impose things on these students at the assembly, she just rebelled against that and she said, 'No, you have to listen to us. We are thinkers, we are human beings. We are not just instruments.'

They wanted to expel her from school but they showed me the letter first. She was serving her punishment and then she came and I talked to them first and I said, 'Well, let me know if what she was saying is totally unfounded.' So then they said, 'No, it is not totally unfounded. But the problem is, she really mobilises other kids and she

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Matabele by Mugabe's Fifth Brigade in the late 1980s; it was particularly because the rural people had it so rough that ADBT chose Tsholotsho as one of the first library projects.

fights with teachers in the open and then as a result teachers lose respect from other children.’ Angela said ‘Everything that I wrote in that letter is the opinion of most of the students, the majority of the students. But they are afraid of facing up to their teachers. They are scared of you. I was raised to speak my mind.’<sup>116</sup>

*Now the very last question is ‘How does it feel to be a woman now?’ Do you ever come up against obstacles?*

I think it feels good to be a woman now but the only obstacle you come across is that men do not seem to think you were made a woman, they think you have the genes of a man. Even other women in the village would go something like ‘that one’s not a woman.’ ‘She’s a man!’ Men would also say, ‘We respect you. You are a man.’ (Something like saying, ‘You are a human,’ you know?) What exactly are they saying? Are they saying I should think of myself as a man because I’ve been able to do all these things? It feels good to be a woman.

*And on the blackness side?*

On the blackness side, well, you don’t find that when you go overseas, say to get donor money, people are thinking, ‘African’ in the sense of ‘inferior.’ The world has changed but it is still a question of individuals. It is more to do with individuals and their respect for humanity. Those individuals are very few. I’ll give you an example. I worked on a project with a white lady, in fact, I worked on a project and in fact evaluated a project after a white lady had done an evaluation. They gave me her report, which was full of errors and then when I did my report, I was quoting some of the things from her report almost word for word. When I sent this report to the funders, they would say, ‘This is not so true.’ They would comment about these things that I got from this lady’s report. And then I said to them, ‘If you are telling me that these things I made reference to, which I actually got from the first evaluation report, are wrong, I understand your concerns about this. But if you approved that report, perhaps your concerns about it should have been raised in the other evaluation report, not in my report. I only used them as references.’ Especially with male whites, they do not think that black women go to

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<sup>116</sup> I think it is sad that Angela chose to go to university in Australia. She told me that it was partly the fear that SA universities would become as political as the University of Zimbabwe and experience similarly disruptive shut-downs but Talent told me there is also a sense in which Angela is not sure she wants to come back to Africa because of the post-independence experience.



that extent. Your disadvantage is double-fold that you are black and you are a woman, you see? That kind of thing.

And sometimes you also see this kind of behaviour whereby when you are working with a volunteer person who is white and you take them to the villages, the obvious reaction from the villagers is that ‘this white person is boss’. They go, ‘Oh, your white *murungu* which simply means ‘your boss’. ‘So you have brought your *murungu* here?’ and they want to check things out with your *murungu*. It’s only when the *murungu* says, ‘No, the actual *murungu* is that one, not me!’ (*laughs*) that they say, ‘Ah! So you’re actually a *murungu* of a *murungu*?’ It works both ways. When you fundraise with people who do not know you, if you don’t have a combined<sup>117</sup> board like what we have with ABDT and ACPD, there is the suspicion that comes from how some black con-artists work.

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<sup>117</sup> ‘Combined’ as in made up of black and white board members.